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WAR IN THE SUN

By

JAMES LANSDALE HODSON

Being some account of a War Correspondent's journeys, meetings, and what was said to him in the Middle East, India, Burma and West Africa during 1941–2

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BOOK 1

THE VOYAGE

* * * *

THIS MORNING I set off to go to our armies in the Middle East. The day is cool and cloudy—a marked change from the south. The port is more scarred than when I saw it on February 28th; when I asked for a good bookshop I was told both had been blitzed out. All the same, the damage is far less than I had imagined. At the landing stage where I reported to the Embarkation Staff Officer the scene was intact. Mighty ships lay alongside—my own with the bows of a yacht—I thought for a moment it might be the *Normandie*, but it wasn't. I had breakfasted at the Midland Adelphi (porridge, egg and bacon and jam, toast, etc.), and next I bought a book on Russian, but with little hope of doing much with it, since languages defeat me or I am too lazy to learn. I spent a while writing to the children, O., Barrie and Ros, the last of whom is disconsolate at my wanting her to wait a further year before joining the Wrens (she is not yet eighteen). O., now a fully qualified flying instructor, gets taller.

I called on two journalist friends, but both are away on holiday. This imperturbable "carrying on" with normal ways strikes me as a trifle odd, though common-sense. I had wondered if either had been wounded, and it occurs to me that among my friends and acquaintances I don't know of a single one who has been hurt in the bombardments of this country—a remarkable fact.

Since Philip Jordan has not come with me, I find myself in a two-berth cabin, alone. I've got a deck table to write at, and I'm comfortable. For a wartime troopship this is luxury; lunch had several courses, excellent brill, and a vegetable hot-pot (among other items). Coffee was first-rate. I sat with two young padres, one R.C., the other Scottish Evangelical, and we had some lively talk which went on till 3.30 p.m. The R.C. padre is anxious to get out to the fighting. During our long talk I suggested it was the Pope's duty to make his statements (or some of them) so short and vigorous that nobody can be in doubt as to which side he thinks ought, for the good of humanity, to win this war; I argued that since his children in Germany cannot know the facts and are unable therefore to reach a proper conclusion, he should reach one for them (just as I should advise my children on something concerning which they were in the dark). The padre answered that, although he himself

is not in the slightest doubt as to which side is in the right, the Pope may possibly not see it so clearly, and that, anyhow, while the Pope is the adviser on all matters of faith, he is not in the same position regarding politics, and especially the politics of a Catholic's own country. No Catholic, he said, is a conscientious objector, for the reason that the Catholic acknowledges his duty to his State.

We talked of the censorship in Eire, a Catholic country. He said he would not necessarily agree with it. I argued that the censorship the Catholics impose is akin to Hitler's burning of books. The padre countered by saying that a proportion of people are not educated enough to come to a right conclusion about all matters and it may be best to keep certain views from them, in the same way that one might from a child. I said that was a slippery slope to set foot upon. Concede that and where would you stop? We had better take the risk of a certain amount of injudicious knowledge than shut knowledge out. There are arguments for jamming Haw-Haw, but better ones for not doing so.

I found him likeable; he looks about twenty-eight.

We discussed birth control, too. I put the case for trying to prevent a woman who had six children from having a seventh when her health is impaired and their economic status low. He said, Yes; anybody must agree with the humanist attitude in such a case, but to consent to birth control generally is to encourage selfishness and to give employers paying bad wages an argument for saying, in reply to a statement that the money he pays won't support a family, that the workman has no right to a family. I said we would all concede that the economic position of the poor should be improved a good deal, but that will take some time and that meanwhile to penalise the poor, overburdened mother is not God's work, but the Devil's. I said that in my view it is a sin against the Holy Ghost to preach to a woman she is sinful if she takes precautions against having the child she is unfit to bear and is terrified of bearing. The padre was strong in his denunciations of our economic system. When I mentioned that the Malvern conference of English bishops had condemned the profit motive in industry (I thought rightly) he said the Catholic Church had condemned it a century ago. I said that in my view neither the childless couple nor the couple overburdened with children are likely to reach that degree of love and happiness and human dignity and spirit of self-sacrifice that having two or three or four children will be likely to evoke.

Another padre, a squadron-leader in the R.A.F. spoke to me on the boat deck. He is " padre of the ship " and will stay with this vessel till she returns to Britain—possibly a period of nine months. He has had to buy his own tropical kit; no allowance made for it. He said: " No wonder more and more warrant officers refuse to take commissions, saying they cannot afford to."

Until a year or so ago he was a missionary in China. He said: " China is the place to see war. The town I was in near Chungking was bombed by the Japanese at a time when none of the people had ever seen an aircraft of any kind—this was their introduction. There was, of course, no A.R.P. or anything of that sort and no doctor nearer than ten miles. People ran into the cornfields and the Japanese machine-gunned them in the corn. There was no military objective within a hundred miles." I asked how the Chinese took it. He said: " They are pretty fatalistic—they are used to calamities." He said that, apart from a little simple first-aid for those not too badly hurt, they could do nothing at all. He added that a trek of Chinese has taken place from east to west, a trek of possibly 90 miles of people, many of whom have died on the way; perhaps it is the biggest trek in history. (I am reminded of the Chinese saying that God lays his inflictions only on those capable of bearing them.) He said the Japanese bombers came to this town six or seven times a month, following the river and coming during the full moon. There was, of course, no resistance.

The Wing Commander in charge of this ship took me to see his quarters. He's got a suite—a room with two beds (" But they haven't provided a blonde ") and a lounge. The padre squadron-leader has a stateroom also, with bath. Dinner to-night was soup, fish, roast duckling, *soufflé*, and a savoury and coffee. Fifty Gold Flake cost 1*s.* 8*d.* This is war *de luxe*.

The lower promenade deck has a chalk mark, and the words " officers" on one side and " airmen " on the other. (Eight times round this deck is a mile.) New bunks have been fitted to parts of the ship for the other ranks—the bunks are of wood, like shallow boxes, but with blankets and pillows they look pretty comfortable. A tug, the *Crosby*, is tucked close alongside our stern, and its crew, oily, hard-bitten men, are lolling about smoking and scratching their heads and staring up at us. There's not much interchange of talk. Surprising how much staring at nothing in particular we can all do. I always liked Joseph Conrad's tale of the skipper who seldom spoke and stared in vast wonderment when he saw two men gossiping. " Can't imagine what you can find to say—what is there to talk about? " he wanted to know. I sometimes feel like that, too. I've often sat aghast in a Continental train when French or Czechs or Italians have talked for hour after hour with the avidity of hungry men tearing into a meal. Talk is as needful to some folk as food and drink.

One of the padres spoke of the problem this Army life causes in breaking up families—men go off with other women and wives with other men. He said: " In some of the cases that come to me both illicit unions have resulted in children. How does one sort such a case out?

It has me beaten." From that we spoke of brothels, and I recalled how the woman who ran the chief brothel in Arras told an officer I knew that our men were not very satisfactory, that they seldom went until they were " tight " and that some of them were so mindless of the girls' welfare that they stubbed their cigarettes on the girls. This sounds brutal, and one imagines few of our men are capable of it, but it was of brutality she (rightly or wrongly) complained. The point is that war raises problems, and often acute ones, that are glossed over and rarely mentioned. It was reported to me that our Army authorities asked for brothels to be set up in French towns or villages that hitherto had not known them; and that the French resented this demand. A very difficult business. When men, even educated and finely nurtured men, are herded together, separated from women for months on end, they develop an interest in sex that is surprising, and women receive attentions who, in the ordinary way, would not draw from these men a tenth part of a glance.

* * * *

I woke up this morning to find us still in the river. Reveille went at 6 a.m. and although I didn't go to bed till close on midnight I was ready to get up. Late last night the R.A.F. lads stamped about the deck on parade and on the sun-deck at 11.30 p.m. a young equipment officer bound for Rhodesia was giving comical descriptions of his training school where they make you do about turns with eyes left—nearly twisted your neck out, he said. Other men are bound for Singapore.

This morning R.A.F. lads and I were using the lavatory labelled " Ladies."

The morning was cold and misty with low cloud. The Scotch padre and I had some talk during which he said that, although he had been depressed by graft and corruption in India (where he was in Assam for three years among the tea-growing folk) he wasn't sure things were much better in Britain. It struck him that the reason a good many people hadn't become rogues was no more than lack of opportunity. His parish was Clydeside. His organist has entered a munitions works and is using a lathe. (He was an engineer before becoming a musician.) This munitions worker asserted he could do two or three times as much output, but is stopped by other workmen. (There's the question, of course, as to whether he could keep it up.)

There are half a dozen padres on this ship, and I find it enjoyable to talk and argue with them. One propounded the theory that a parson with the poor should live like a poor man, but a parson with the rich, like a rich man. I said, on the contrary, his life and ways should be a rebuke to the rich. Could he imagine Jesus living as a prince?

Just after lunch we began to move slowly down river and by three o'clock were passing a line of blunt-nosed tankers coming in after their long voyages. They were an encouraging sight. One was Norwegian, another Greek. I could see as many as fifteen merchant ships at the same time. We were all, by order, wearing lifebelts, but the sailors on these tankers passing, so to speak, down the other side of the street, had no such belts—they were in shirt sleeves or half-naked, and looked no different from the piping days of peace. Presently we dropped our pilot, and so did a Polish destroyer and a former U.S.A. destroyer with paint a Mediterranean grey and four funnels (she's a queer-looking cove). These last two are among our escort.

We're the front of the convoy, and next behind us comes a big three-funnelled ship. We could go a lot faster than we do. The sea this afternoon was black and violet and silver—a fine sight; and what with the vast sea and the solidity and steadiness of this ship, one has a great sense of security. However, we were summoned to our boat stations—mine is No. 6 on E deck. We have 67 men for one boat. I hope it'll hold them. We've a young pilot officer whose job is signals and codes and, I'm told, a ship's officer will come too. (I must remember to keep my water-bottle full.) The stewards have a blue lifebelt that fits like a thick waistcoat. Hanging in front is a whistle and on the shoulder is a small red electric lamp.

The Wing-Commander and the ship's first officer came round and explained that six short blasts and one long means go to your emergency boat stations, and six short means take cover from air attack. We were just dismissing when the air attack was sounded and there was some scuttering below, but I suspected this was merely a feint, for the old U.S. destroyer was doing no shooting at all, although our own Lewis guns were popping off. Just afterwards an airman came up and saluted and said did I remember him. I said I was afraid not. He said: "I was your chauffeur when last you visited Sheffield—I was at the *Telegraph* office."

After that, we all went to tea and the Wing-Commander joined me and had a long crack.

The Wing-Commander (he is O.C. ship) has the blue eye and fresh complexion of a sailor. He first flew with Colonel Cody in 1911 and, not long ago, when he visited the Science Museum in Kensington, found there the identical aircraft. "Indeed," he said, "I had flown at one time or other most of the types in that museum and felt a bit of a museum piece myself." He said Cody was a good flyer—in 1911 he took my companion up for three-quarters of an hour and to 1,000 feet.

The Wing-Commander is very cheerful about the hammering Germany is going to receive from us in about three months' time and perhaps before. In his view we have the fighter position "taped," soon we shall have the night enemy bombers pretty-well taped also, and in the near

future our new and mighty bombers, bigger and faster and able to make the return journey to Berlin during comparatively short hours of darkness, will make their onslaught. He said the advance in science is such that shortly scientists, speaking from the ground, will be able to say to an airman in the skies: " The German aircraft you have not seen is at such and such a spot and if you fire your guns now you'll get him." He thinks we are miles ahead of the enemy in our scientific devices; indeed, entering a sort of fairyland. He said: " The Germans will never be able to stand what is coming to them—our bombing of Germany by day from such a height that their planes cannot intercept us. Hitler hoped that this sort of bombing would win the war for him. It hasn't, but in our hands it will do more to win than anything else." He has seen much service in India (he taught to fly the only two Indians who flew in the last war), believes in telepathy, and says examples of thought transference are so common in the East that you accept them as a matter of course.

* * * *

Last night we ran into light fog and at 2.30 a.m. to-day somebody hammered on the door and said: " Get dressed quickly." I am not a swift performer in these matters, and when I got to the stairs with overcoat on (fully dressed) I met men coming back and saying they had been told to stand by in their cabins. I went on deck and walked round for half an hour. It was not dark—you could see a hundred yards, and presently a misty light, a mile off, loomed up like a candle showing in mist, and later, from a masthead close to it, a signal light winked at us. A similar misty light was on the starboard side also, a mile ahead. I thought at first these were lights on ships keeping station in the convoy, but we passed the one on the port side and, maybe, they were lightships. I turned in, keeping part of my clothes on. (The young doctor at my table went to bed in clothes and mackintosh.) This morning we are still in fog, with our horn blaring at intervals. These fog horns have character. Ours is a deep bass, with a touch of harmony—the Rolls-Royce of horns. Two last night had the shrill, cocky note of trawlers, and a third couldn't keep her note more than a moment and wailed down the scale at once. By breakfast-time to-day we were rolling a trifle and it is plain this 25,000-ton ship will roll when the sea warrants it. (The R.C. padre whose home is Liverpool says seamen think 10,000 to 15,000 tons is the best size for all-weather ships. He adds that attempts have been made to build ships, so to speak, in two pieces so that they can " pivot "—but without much success.) I was the last at my table for four (two young R.A.F. doctors, the padre and myself) and my steward began to talk to me. He is a good-humoured, imperturbable " Geordie " from Newcastle (with the accent on the " castle "). He said: " Seven of us live together below and we keep a sheet of rumours, putting down the

town we're going to and crossing it off when it turns out to be wrong. On this trip at the moment we are going to Freetown, Cape Town, Durban, Bombay, Singapore and Sydney. In other words, nobody knows. We've already been, on this trip, to Archangel to help the Russians and to Iceland. We have some fun with the wireless, too. You'd be surprised to hear the varied accounts of what's been said by the B.B.C. chaps. If he says we've shot down thirteen enemy and lost nine of ours, by the time it gets downstairs it's thirty-three or 330 or some such thing. In the old days chaps would have an argument and say, ' I'll bet you it isn't,' and we could settle it when we got to port, but you can't do that now. The radio voice talks and that's the finish of it."

I asked him if he's had any adventures.

He said: " Not on this ship, but I had at Narvik and Dunkirk and St. Nazaire. At Narvik I was on the *Empress of Australia*. We were very lucky—seventeen dropped all round us and we got orders to clear out, so we got rid of all our garbage (we'd been hoping to dump it somewhere) and what with the oil of destroyers and our garbage on the sea, we were reported sunk. That night, just as we turned on another tack, a torpedo ran past—we never saw it, only heard of it afterwards and our destroyer, soon after, dropped a depth charge and we saw the bow or stern of the U-boat come up—just like a big buoy it was, sticking out of the water. At Dunkirk we were all right—I was on a little ship running men from the beach to the destroyers—we could hold thirty-six, but we usually took about fifty. Then at St. Nazaire we were lucky, too. I was on the *Oronzay* (?) and we had only about two bombs near us during the five hours the *Lancastria* was bombed and at last sunk." I asked if he knew why that ship didn't weigh anchor and clear off, once she had her complement aboard. He said he didn't know. They all seemed to be waiting for an escort, but an escort wasn't really necessary—you had to take a chance, anyhow.

On the last voyage to the Cape of this ship, she took out Australians and New Zealanders. The steward said they were the liveliest and roughest men he had ever come across. They were drilled morning and afternoon right through the tropics, and the more they were drilled the tougher and leaner and livelier they got—thought nothing of catching one another a clout with a butt end. Those, he said, were the men who fought in Crete.

The ship has now developed her authentic strain and creak. Presumably we are running into open sea.

The Flight-Lieutenant doctor with the cherubic face was stationed until a week or two ago in the Shetlands. The winds were unusually high. He refused to put his ambulance in its hut till they pegged the hut down. One such hut was blown out to sea, he said, and he had no intention of watching his ambulance emulate a flying boat. In Fair Isle nothing of

importance had occurred since a ship of the Spanish Armada was blown ashore there in 1588. They talk of that event still. Some of his comrades went fishing there occasionally. The first time they offered the old gentleman whose boat they used, and who accompanied them, the sum of 5*s*. He looked at it with interest and then handed it back. " I don't think I'll have it," he said. " I've never had any money in my life yet, and I've got on quite well without it."

We stalk the decks (it is getting colder) and stare at our accompanying ships through binoculars. I have borne these glasses over immense distances and this is almost the first occasion they have been truly useful. We have now got a number of destroyers guarding over us like watchdogs. (In the mist this morning the Polish destroyer sailed near and shouted to us not to go so fast.) Two of the destroyers have a tall funnel and a short one, the U.S.A. old lady has four funnels, and the Pole one. (I'm told the Polish ship is one of our newest which we have handed over to them, but I don't know whether this is true. Men's curiosity is unbounded. They come to me and inquire about these ships and where we are and whither we are bound, thinking that I shall know. In truth, I know nothing. Our convoy is scattered over a vast area. The destroyers lie ahead or on the flanks and occasionally we see them broadside and occasionally head-on. Most of the while they appear to be stationary and sleeping. In the evening they wink their golden signals at us as we wink our incomprehensibilities back. Our R.A.F. signallers among the passengers tell one another what those signals mean with perfect inaccuracy.)

A R.A.F. doctor has produced his fiddle and one of the young officers tackles the grand piano. Both, in their way, capital. More remarkable, as the padre and I walked round the ship this morning we lighted on a pair of comedians entertaining the lads on the after-deck. One had got hold of an old farmer's hat and wig, a blanket and had taken off his trousers. The other was acting an ape or aboriginal man—hair rumpled, prehensile jaw, staring, hard blue eyes, and grimaces. The captor spoke no known language and the ape did tricks; also they danced. They looked a pair of throw-backs and were very funny on this Sunday morning. Looking hard at the captor, I saw he was the Sheffield chauffeur who spoke to me yesterday. You wouldn't have thought, then, that butter would melt in his mouth. Now he was entertaining a couple of hundred folk, a regular Marx Brother.

These young doctors and other officers are very ready to talk of how we shall get a decent peace. I say to them that Germany must not be allowed to have any arms, that she has proved herself a pathological case, and that we and U.S.A. and Russia ought to control a federal air

force to ensure no aggressor starts air bombing again. I find a lot of agreement in these ideas. A South African Signals officer about twenty-three, said Yes, but we can't stop at a federal air force. We must go further. I agreed that was so, but until we have put an end to this barbarism in the air, no security of life and living will exist.

Not all the cabins were occupied by officers (we have but fifty-nine on board) and some of the airmen have now been put into them—rightly. This step doesn't commend itself to all the officers, some of whom look sideways at this march of democracy.

R.A.F. doctor's remark: " The air pilots are more akin to gods than anybody there has ever been."

The youthful pilot officer who will come in my boat in emergency has been finding out, at my suggestion, if it is properly stocked with food, etc. He says it is, and that it has plenty of rum. We must all now carry our lifebelts constantly (ship's order). But I don't see the naval or mercantile marine officers carrying theirs.

* * * *

A perfect morning—sun, green sea with white caps, and our fellow ships dipping their noses well into it. When more destroyers came up yesterday, white foam burst over their bows as they raced along, overtaking us like boys who'd been dawdling and suddenly found they were late. We have a new cruiser painted a sort of brick-dust violet. Our guard increases—now several cruisers and destroyers. In addition, we have armoured merchant ships But, so far, we have had no excitement (not that I want any). Some of our ships are now flying a kite from the mast—it soars up to hinder dive-bombing.

The Wing-Commander tells me we missed a small coaster by only 12 feet in the fog two nights ago. The language was rich. Until last night our captain had had no sleep. We put our watches back two hours last evening and are now sailing to G.M.T. I had turned in about 10 p.m. when, first, an officer arrived to say I must sleep with my cabin door open, and, later, another arrived to say a new order commanded us to sleep with all our clothes on and wearing lifebelts. This is sensible, but a damned nuisance. The doctor tells me some officers and men have already been seasick, but the padre added that one lad admitted he had eaten 1 lb. of slab chocolate the night before. These lads have been buying from the ship's shop large amounts of chocolate and cigarettes. Indeed, we are back to peace days so far as food and so forth go. Breakfast to-day was prunes, porridge, plaice, bacon and egg and mushrooms, toast, rolls, marmalade and several cold dishes as variations

to bacon and egg. The standard is but little below that of a pleasure cruise in the old days. The men's food is first-rate too, and about 500 of them are in cabins, some of them First Class cabins.

The young R.C. padre is full of sense. He said to me yesterday: "If a man is a convert, better inquire if he is better-off afterwards than he was before. If he is worse off, all right. If better off, well, it won't follow that he is dishonest, but . . ." I asked if being celibate did not place an undue strain on the normal man. He said it often did, but then if you had never enjoyed that side of life you didn't miss it so much—your body hadn't been taught to expect it. I said I didn't think the body required any teaching—the urge was there. He said one of the advantages of being unmarried is that you can better afford to help other folk, and you have more time to devote to them.

It is a magnificent sight to see this piece of sea filled with ships. My ship is over 100 feet longer than any other in this convoy and we ride the swell better in consequence. Standing on a copper band which runs across the deck, I felt it shifting beneath my feet—one of the contrivances for allowing strain. My cabin is amidships, and hereabouts there's great creaking and straining—sometimes as though you ran a cane along a basket.

The padre gets up before six to take Mass. I said that if he would wake me, I would walk the deck with him. He said: "I talk such drivel when I first wake up that I don't think I'll rouse you. I've been concussed twice playing football, and first thing in the morning it takes me a few minutes to wake up. I dream a lot and this too I suppose is the after-effects of concussion."

One young doctor at my table, who is aquiline, sandy, bespectacled, and talks so that you can hardly hear him, argued against a State medical service on the ground that it would reduce him to the level of a purser, and he'd no intention of being so reduced. He wants reforms, though. He wants doctors to work in a team of partners so that men's ailments can receive proper attention—clearly no one general medical practitioner can treat everything. The padre at breakfast pulled their legs by saying the last military hospital he was in had very slack discipline—the medical staff and nurses were larking about till past 11 p.m., keeping patients awake. (He meant what he said.)

Talking to the Wing-Commander, I happened to say that women are more important in the matter of parenthood than men, quoting the Newmarket trainer who said to me you can breed winners from a donkey if the mare is good enough. He said: "It is impossible to persuade the Arabs to sell you one of their mares—anything else, but not a mare."

I added that it takes two or three generations to produce a fine human face, though you can do it if the stock be that of a cobbler if the family has character. He smiled and said drily: " People don't like admitting that, do they? "

* * * *

A dirty morning, light fog and choppy sea. It didn't, however, prevent us having our customary five-course breakfast. The doctor, who had bacon and egg with sausage, mushrooms, and a semola cake (like a small piece of Yorkshire pudding), finished with waffles and maple syrup. An aircraftman said to me yesterday the meals on board are so good that it makes him uncomfortable when he thinks of the folk at home. I said he had better make the most of it, for nobody knows what lies ahead.

It is reported we have had a bit of excitement—I don't vouch for it. About 6.30 last evening I saw two of our destroyers stop and lie to and then go off to our far left, astern. When they approached the horizon two or three bangs occurred, as though somebody down below had shut an iron door—rather muffled. A pilot officer who was using my glasses said he saw depth charges going overside, but I looked and saw nothing—no column of water that one would have expected. Our U.S.A. destroyer on the horizon burst into a veritable orgy of signalling, winking and flashing. The doctor said drily she was (*a*) an aircraft carrier and (*b*) a battleship, to which I countered: " Are you sure she isn't on fire? " During dinner three authentic bangs occurred which were depth charges right enough, but a long way off. We fell into discussion with our " Geordie " steward, who said, in his matter-of-fact way, that it's a good plan to take with you a Balaclava helmet when you leave a sinking ship, and to wear a greatcoat and shoes. Pull-overs and such are no good once they are wet. (Another man who has been sunk twice says: " Never jump overboard—wait till the sea rises to your level and then just walk in. Oh, yes, you'll be sucked down, but you'll come up.") " Geordie " says he keeps a tot of whisky and a few cigarettes wrapped in oilskin. At 11 p.m., just before turning in, a cabin steward on deck said we had sunk a submarine, and this morning at breakfast our steward says we sank two—a second about midnight. The cherubic doctor reports noise of gunfire about that time. Alas! ten minutes later " Geordie " returned to vouchsafe that, although his first information came from a quartermaster on the bridge at the time of the excitement, the Third Officer says he knows nothing of sinking any submarines. This is the authentic troops' atmosphere—what we used to call " latrine rumours and gossip." But how much more interesting rumours can be than the facts; and what is truth in wartime, anyhow? Maybe the Third Officer knows and thinks it wisest not to divulge anything. All very amusing.

I've omitted to add that " Geordie " said: " On a ship like this, with

its steel doors always closed, you'll have time to put a lifebelt on—unless the torpedo hits the boilers, in which case you'll go up, lifebelt or no "—this on the subject of sleeping in lifebelts.

A R.A.F. doctor who came East at two days' notice tells me he had Haw-Haw as a tutor in 1929—at a tutorial school behind Victoria Station. Haw-Haw taught him French and German. The doctor said: " He was a brilliant linguist and hammered stuff into you. But he was full of himself, walked about with a swagger, talked of having been in the Irish Guards. There's no mistaking the voice once you've heard it. He had a scar on his cheek running from the mouth which became livid when he sneered."

We talked of our fine R.A.F. lads. He said he thought they have a sense of superiority over the Germans; and he thought our men, since the *Blitz*, have developed a greater ferocity. Two of his squadron went " mushrooming," as they call it, got to the French coast and turned, one west, one east. The one going east saw a German staff car, machine-gunned it, saw two staff officers clamber out and hide in the hedge, noted the spot, rose to 700 feet, dived right down on them and shot them. The other who turned west came on a column of enemy troops on the march, came down to O feet and sprayed them. He reported one man's head was cut clean off.

Describing the pilots' great spirits, he said the squadron returned one afternoon full of triumph at having shot down about thirteen enemy. The doctor asked: " Where's so and so ? " naming one of our pilots.

" Oh, he was shot down."

" Shot down. Is he ?——"

" Oh, he's O.K., sure. Came down on the Goodwins; gave us a jolly running commentary as he did it—we all hovered over him to protect him. He was saying, ' Shall I bale out ? No, I think not. I can get down here. Easy does it—now then, old girl—whoops, here we go.' Until, finally, he came down and tipped over on his nose and we heard a string of profanity, and next we saw him get out his little dinghy."

The doctor said that on busy days these lads may do as many as seven sorties, each lasting an hour. He and other doctors have been taking up the question of the pilots' meals (a question I raised with Air-Marshal Babington in April), and finally got it to the pitch of seven meals a day (two of them rather scratch, of course). He said he had proposed that all sedentary officers should do without sugar to give an extra supply to the pilots; moreover, after a struggle, he got the old dug-outs and old sweats among the officers shifted from a centre block which was well-heated last winter, so that the pilots could have it. He argued that we can't do enough for the pilots, a view sound and admirable.

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It was rougher during the night; we rolled at times considerably but, so far, very few people are ill. This morning is sunnier and warmer and the sea a lovely greenish-blue. The war news yesterday was graver—the Germans claim to have captured Minsk and to be on the way to Moscow with their tanks. The Russians don't confirm it, but, in matters of towns, etc., the German High Command news is usually substantially accurate (since it could be so easily disproved). Here one sits aloof and lets the world go by, a pleasant and godlike feeling.

I've been reading H. V. Morton's *Middle East*—agreeable, ornamental stuff, but boring. Of his personality little or nothing emerges. On Cairo and Alexandria, in which I am interested, his stuff is thin.

One of our C. of E. padres has lent me the pamphlet published on the Archbishop of York's Malvern conference, at which they passed a number of resolutions (last January) saying that the predominance of the profit motive in industry offends against their principles, declaring the rights of labour must be recognised in principle as equal to capital in control of industry, and asserting that it is but a half-truth to say that if we change the individual we shall of necessity change the social order. "This method of ordering industry, which tends to treat human work and human satisfaction alike as a means to a false end—namely, monetary gain—becomes a source of unemployment at home and dangerous competition for markets abroad. . . . The system under which we have lived has been a predisposing cause of war, even though those who direct and profit by it have desired peace." All this is well said, but it's a pity it wasn't said long ago. Talking with two of the padres, I said that, granted Christ was a world teacher and redeemer, wasn't it unfortunate that God delayed so long in sending him on earth, and was it not equally unfortunate that He has not sent further ones like him to complete the work? We had some talk on man's free will, arising from their statement that there are limits to God's power. I said I couldn't help feeling that God hadn't done His job very well, and that if man is no abler than he is at looking after himself and ordering the world and his affairs, it's a pity the Almighty didn't keep a bit more power in His own hands. These good-humoured discussions are enjoyable. I added that another difficulty I find is that He who doth mark the sparrow's fall allows children to be born with club feet and squints and drawbacks of one sort or another—drawbacks which no average man would permit if he could prevent it; and that to get out of awkward corners by asserting the ways of God are inscrutable makes no particular appeal to me. I had a go, too, at Church ritual and incense-burning and genuflecting and so

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forth, all of which seems to me to get in the way of simplicity and sincerity. The R.C. padre argued that poor, unintelligent folk want something that appeals to their sense of colour and imagery, something apart from reason.

A R.N.V.R. Lieutenant tells me most U-boat attacks are now made at night. (Formerly, dawn and dusk were the danger periods.) It is common, he said, for U-boats to keep a torpedo tube filled with oil and a dead body to shoot to the surface, thus trying to mislead us into thinking we've accounted for it. (The German trick of raising dummy fires and explosions near their cities when we bomb them is well-known.) In his view, the Focke-Wulff aircraft are by no means so dangerous as the Heinkels and Dorniers.

The radio announces that General Wavell is leaving the Middle East for India, and that Oliver Lyttelton, given Cabinet rank, is going out to Cairo. (I jokingly said to Lord Kemsley before I left that I should soon be sending messages from the Khyber Pass.)

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I am reading with a good deal of pleasure *Night Flight*, by de Saint-Exupéry. He says, speaking of courage: " It's a concoction of feelings that are not so very admirable. A touch of anger, a spice of vanity, a lot of obstinacy, and a tawdry ' sporting ' thrill. . . . I shall never again admire a merely brave man."

For myself, I think high courage is comparatively rare and I can admire it for itself. It is commonly said that the man is not brave who has no fear, and that the truly brave man is frightened and overcomes it. That's as it may be. Nelson became rather exalted in danger (he was a somewhat theatrical character), and maybe he had not the ordinary fears. But was he less admirable for that ? I much envy the man with no nerves, and admire him, too. Partly because he is so different from me. I grant that the man who is frightened can be very likeable; his owning of his weakness gives him something of an endearing quality; there's a sense in which admission of fear makes fear easier to bear by others—they feel they are not so bad, after all. André Gide, in a Preface to *Night Flight*, thanks Saint-Exupéry for bringing out the truth that man's happiness lies, not in freedom, but in his acceptance of a duty—it is only in fulfilling his perilous task that he finds contentedness and peace.

There's no doubt that many a man finds in the risks of war a dignity or worthwhileness that didn't exist for him in peace. Imagine a man who hawked vacuum cleaners and was insulted and humiliated half his days, now serving his Lewis gun on the deck of this ship and watching the

skies for the enemy; that must seem to him an infinitely cleaner and better job and his spirit must rise to it.

Another truth emerges from this book—that men don't dislike a hard master if he is equally hard to the lot of them. Strict discipline is not resented, but rather the reverse, provided all get the same square (or rough) deal. A Scots Guard at my cadet school was asked which regiment he wished to go to after being commissioned. He said: " I'd like to go back to the Guards. Ye do know where ye are i' the Guards. They give you hell—but everybody gets hell too, so that's a' richt."

The Admiralty are extremely careful before they concede a U-boat has been sunk (as are the Air Ministry on claims to have shot down an enemy). This is all to the good, because it means our claims are under the mark rather than over. A Lieutenant, R.N.V.R., said to me: " One day we were sure we'd sunk a submarine. A bubble came up 150 yards across—it couldn't have been a hiccough. But the Admiralty wouldn't grant it."

Light and colour on the sea are remarkable, and often beautiful. At eleven o'clock last night the sea on the starboard quarter was dark green and grey, but to port it was lilac, a colour on the sea I have never seen before—a question of fading light and shadow. The sea was calm, so that ships hardly seemed to move, so thin was the wash at the bows. For long periods I can walk the deck and watch the ships about us like a boy watching trains go by. I think of Nelson once spending two years at sea without going ashore. I enjoy the knowledge that I am cut off from messages—nobody can get at me nor I at them. Fine.

Late last night the R.C. padre and I talked of limitations of freedom (for I suppose we should all agree that complete freedom is impossible). The Catholic Church, as we all know, bans certain books. This is justified on the ground that, since certain rules and ideas are fundamental to the Faith, it would be absurd to spend time reading, or allow to be read, writings that argue the opposite. He went on to talk of cheap pornographic literature—why allow it to be sold to young people, thus upsetting them and possibly harming them? I said most of us would agree that there is stuff we should prefer our children didn't see, at all events until they are older, but that the very censorship gives the book an attraction it didn't possess—the child is made to think it more important than it is. As for censoring opposing beliefs or arguments, doing so suggests you fear that their presentation will result in your doctrine being overthrown—a weak position to take up. Moreover, carried to excess, it would preserve reaction and outmoded ideas which science or progressive thought has proved false. The *Daily Worker* cropped up. Its banning, I thought, could be justified in war when we are fighting for our lives, but not in peace; but this, too, is dangerous ground. The *Daily Worker*

is banned without being prosecuted; Mosley is imprisoned without trial. Both dangerous steps.

At breakfast we discussed grey hair and baldness. The two doctors said that medical knowledge doesn't know why we turn grey. One asked: " Do you believe in going grey in a night ? " I said: " I don't know, but my son of twenty-one, a pilot, has already grey hairs, and isn't it true some of the lads who flew through the Battle of Britain have prematurely grey hair ? " But why do eyebrows remain dark while hair turns grey ? Why is a moustache dark and beard grey ? Why is a moustache sandy and the top of the head dark (as I see in a man aboard)? No answer to these.

This ship holds a remarkable wealth of diverse experience. We have about nine young R.A.F. doctors from operational, training and balloon stations. One from a balloon station said to me: " On a Saturday afternoon I was dozing when the telephone went. I took off the receiver. A voice said: ' Can you come, sir ? One of the chaps has been carried up by the balloon and is drifting out to sea.' I checked the wind—yes, it was going out to sea. I rang up the Naval surgeon. ' This is your pigeon, I think,' I said. ' O.K.' he said, ' I'll get a duty boat out.' I drove down. Two thousand feet up we could see the chap, a sickening sight, hanging to the guy ropes below the balloon, with two hands and one leg round which the rope was caught. He was being flung to and fro and bashed about. But the balloon hadn't broken loose and was got down after the chap had been up ten minutes. He wasn't much worse—rather like a man who has been involved in a cycle accident. But three weeks later he became very nervous and morose and had to be sent away."

We discussed the effects of developing general paralysis of the insane and the fashion in which sufferers become exalted and imagine they are millionaires. One such man impoverished his family by buying a succession of grand pianos for which he had not the means. Another man. otherwise charming, began to bury his money under the front-door mat, One doctor said: " In my hospital ward, I had a patient who had delusions. One night his bed was empty and it was some time before we found him under another bed five beds down the ward. When we asked what he was doing there, he said: ' I was reading this book and the words ran away and I had to come down here to collect them—they were all under this bed.' "

I was curious to know what proportion of men fall by the way in qualifiying for medicine. A doctor said: " Of the fifty who started with me, only five got their M.B. About ten more took the conjoint examination successfully (this is a rather lower form of exams.) and about twenty had settled down to being, so to speak, life students who may take an

extra two or three years to get through. The remainder had fallen out altogether." This I find is a pretty general average—10 per cent. getting the degree. About 30 per cent. fall out during the first year—partly because they find it dull and hard work and not yet bearing any relation to treating diseases. A lot fall by the way in theology too—the R.C. padre estimated it at about 50 per cent. An interesting thought, that the world is littered with men whose original intention it was to be doctors and priests. The padre said that in Catholic families little boys say, "I want to be a priest," as in Protestant families they announce they'll be engine-drivers.

Our half-dozen padres are busy censoring letters. Although we are many days distant from any opportunity of posting them, aircraftmen are writing letters like mad, some of them eleven or fourteen pages long (and some of them are promising their wives to write every day!) Never in history have armed forces written so many letters for never have such periods of boredom in war existed. Men write at the close of the letter, after a row of kisses, "BOLTOP," which, being interpreted, means "Better on lips than on paper," or "HOLLAND," meaning "Hope our love lasts and never dies." I wonder what Hitler's men-at-arms do?

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To-day for the first time we all wore drill. The day has been superb—sun, wind, and a blue sea. But with it a touch of moisture in the air, so that tables and clothes are slightly damp. This afternoon the boat deck was littered with folk in sports shorts, white shirts, etc., and by four o'clock several young officers were nursing sunburnt arms or knees.

A doctor has been telling me how one hears the verdict at the College of Surgeons after your *viva voce* examinations, etc. On the last day they are admirably prompt and put you out of your agony at once. He said: "You sit in a dim lecture room waiting—the strongest spirits are subdued after a bit. You may sit a long while, for fifty or a hundred are waiting. One by one you are called. A small door in the far right corner opens and your name is called. You go through that door and find yourself in front of a man with an enormous ledger, like Gabriel in Heaven. He is flanked by two large men, apparently there for the purpose of protecting him. He says, 'Ah, Mr. So-and-So, number So-and-So,' and he runs his finger down the ledger. Then he either says, 'Ah, you've passed,' or the reverse. If you've failed, you go downstairs and make a miserable exit through a cloakroom. If you've passed, you go upstairs and join the elated throng and after a wait you go in to a row of professors and receive a little pi-jaw." He went on to tell me of one of his ambulance drivers who was taking two mental cases to hospital. On the way he saw a barrage balloon wrapped round a telephone pole.

The sight was so bizarre that he stopped his ambulance, got down and called the attendant from inside. " Tell me," he said. " Can you see this, or have I gone off my rocker, too ? "

The R.C. padre says that of all the death-beds he has attended only one was marked by a great struggle on the part of the dying man. The remainder for some hours prior to the last moments seemed to be at peace. As he prayed beside his brother's death-bed, his brother opened his eyes and smiled and said: " I hope your knees aren't hurting you."

Parsons don't often get to Fair Isle. When they do, they occasionally find themselves confronted with a demand for services by many sects, and solve the problem by taking one after another, Church of Scotland, Presbyterian, Methodist or whatever they are; and the congregations, equally charitable, have been known to troop from one church to the other to hear all the sermons.

" Nothing to be thrown down the closets " reads a notice. What (as somebody has remarked) is this nothing that must be thrown down ? A job for A. P. Herbert, revising our public notices.

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Played bridge last night with O.C. troops and a couple of doctors. My most ardent admirer could hardly say I play the game well. Conventions mean less than nothing to me. My partner's calls (at contract), when he switches from spades to hearts and thence to no trumps, leave me befogged. I suppose a long and painful apprenticeship would teach me something, but I doubt it. I am similarly less than 50 per cent. efficient at chess. It is rather a mystery how people whose general intelligence and common sense strikes me as most ordinary can excel at these games. We had a long and animated discussion of the game *l'Attaque* (in which each player has generals, scouts, spies, mines, artillery, etc.). This became quite ardent. Here we were, officers fifty years old, engrossed in this boyish game's problems in the midst of this bloody war; but this whole voyage becomes like a pleasure cruise. The A.C.2's are enjoying an experience that nothing but a war could have afforded most of them. Those who survive will look back on it with delight. Here's one of the minor contributory causes of war—that part of it is enjoyable. How make peace as adventurous? That's one of our problems.

At midnight the cherubic doctor and I walked the boat-deck talking of newspapers. He thought it a bit thick that journalists have the

effrontery to criticise the work of senior officers in our armed forces. I said his was a natural reaction, but the fact is that our generals, etc., are often wrong and the writers sometimes right. I said, for instance, that a correspondent with the troops from time to time stumbles on some grievance of officers and men and can help to get it remedied. Even I in my small way since this war started have helped to get men reimbursed for money they spent on gum boots in the autumn of 1939, and to put a stop to the rule under which wives at home lost part of their separation allowances when their husbands at the front got drunk and had so many days' pay stopped as a punishment. To punish wives for the misdemeanours of husbands was unfortunate and led to domestic strife. (Of course, wives always do suffer in peacetime from husbands' misbehaviour, but it is bad luck on them and we ought to prevent it when we can.) The doctor then went on to tell me of a grievance that needs correction. It seems that when a sergeant rear-gunner or wireless operator is wounded while flying against the enemy, and is by reason of his injuries prevented from flying afterwards, he has to revert to the rank—it may be aircraftman or corporal—that he held before he got his sergeant's stripes. Thus he loses rank and pay because he has been badly hurt in his country's service. This loss of pay and rank can apply to officers, too, if their spell in hospital is beyond a certain period (at one time it was three weeks, but now it is longer—I think three months). That is, if a flight-lieutenant, for example, is acting squadron-leader and is wounded and remains longer than three months sick, he reverts to flight-lieutenant. Inasmuch as he may have been wounded because of his valiance, it seems an ill reward. It is difficult to understand why these anomalies exist. Lord Mottistone in the Lords recently strove to right the ancient law under which a private soldier who becomes prisoner of war is held to have surrendered unheroically, whereas no such absurd suggestion is made regarding officers. He had to hammer hard to get Lord Croft to promise to look into it further.

I knew of the loss Air Force officers may suffer as a result of wounds a year ago, and wrote a few lines on it after visiting a bomber station. The Air Ministry, to whom I had to submit my article, cut out the lines in question. I was remiss in not insisting on printing it. But I grow sick and tired sometimes of swimming against the stream, pointing out deficiencies and absurdities. This, no doubt, is one reason why, when the Opposition takes its part in a Coalition Government, the former critics become just as hidebound and wrapped in red tape as those they formerly attacked. The relief at being in the Government and " belonging " must be great, and they rest on their oars. Those holding power commonly assert they do not like " Yes-men " round them, but my experience is that they assuredly do; and that's not unnatural. None of us revels in cricitism, even though it be the life blood of democracy.

The cherubic doctor raised also the question of truth in newspapers—

said he was tired of reading how we had inflicted more casualties on the enemy than they on us, how we fought against overwhelming odds, and so forth. I replied that the newspapers are in favour of telling the truth so far as they can discover it and so far as it doesn't encourage the enemy too much or discourage us; but that the official point of view has been frequently much too optimistic (as when Air Marshal Goddard said Crete could not be taken by air invasion and when the official military spokesmen in Cairo said, after we had lost Cyrenaica, that Cyrenaica was merely a liability). The journalists print those statements and are later condemned as roundly as if they had coined them instead of merely reporting them. (The inability of readers to distinguish between what a paper reports and what it expresses as its own view is immense.) But in any event, I said, the truth about many events cannot yet be told. The truth about Dunkirk, for example, has not been recorded in the sense that features of it which shed no lustre on those concerned have been unpublished. That is true also of the bombing of our cities. The pretence that all men in uniform are heroes persists, although every soldier knows it is rot. The correspondent is constantly faced by the need to gloss over some mistake or stupidity, feeling that it is best to do so for the good of our cause and knowing that those with intimate knowledge of the event will condemn him (thoughtlessly) for doing it. Moreover, the censor often destroys his work and makes the net result balderdash, leaving him to bear the brunt; for no reader is aware of what the censor has removed.

We had some talk, too, on the fact that most of us need to undergo suffering to make us decent, tolerant, people. A too-easy and successful life makes for arrogance and ill-breeding. On the subject of sergeant gunners reverting to lower rank, he cited the case of a sergeant gunner shot in the eye and blinded in that eye. He recovered his health and wished to fly again, since he was a qualified wireless operator as well as gunner. This was refused and he was reverted to corporal. His C.O. was struck by this injustice and recommended him for a commission. This the lad has now got, but he is unhappy in the rank and says, moreover, that he can't afford to hold it.

I asked the Chief Engineer this morning if I might look at his engines. He said it isn't allowed—fear of sabotage. I asked if he were serious—he said he was. He's a genial Scot. We listened to the radio news. I said it might be worse—the Russians are still fighting hard. He said: " If the Germans have not got Leningrad and Moscow by the end of July, the war'll be over by October. The Russians saved the British Empire at the beginning of the last war, and maybe they'll do it again." It's surprising (or maybe not surprising) how many folk have a warm corner for the Russians.

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Further note on Fair Isle: Seventy people live there, of whom some fifty bear the surname of Stout. Manifestly they are indistinguishable by their Christian names, so that the habit has arisen of calling them by their houses, as, for instance, Hannah Rock Cottage, Old Tom of the Shop, Jonathan Schoolhouse (or whatever it may be). I asked the doctor who visited it if there is a policeman or any crime or vice there. He said he didn't hear of any—couldn't even discover any drink! One inhabitant who acts as helmsman and works on various crofts is one of the highest authorities on birds in the British Isles. The island is in the direct line of migration from the north, and snipe, for instance, sometimes fall exhausted and can be picked up readily. There isn't a tree, grass is but a few inches high in summer and grazing is so valuable that a rock separated from the mainland is used, to the tip of which sheep are slung on ropes and left during the winter. He said the atmosphere of the island is extremely pleasant—everybody knows everybody else, but this appears not to result in strife. When he was there the schoolmaster had but five pupils and he wondered where the next batch are coming from, since only one baby exists. The doctor said the teas he ate were the most delicious he has ever had—a variety of scones and jams and lovely butter.

" Geordie " told us this morning of a pleasure cruise he sailed on, during which eleven people died—the Chief Engineer, the head waiter, a deck boy and the rest passengers. It was a long cruise and there were about 800 people on board and he didn't think the death-roll unduly heavy. " Of course," he said, " you don't advertise the funerals. About six in the morning or half-past eleven at night, two or three of the crew assemble, somebody reads a bit from the Bible, and it's all over in a jiffy. Days later a passenger'll say: ' What's become of Mrs. So-and-So? Buried—and I missed it ! Tch ! Tch ! ' "

" Geordie " is a plater by trade and hates the sea. He came afloat because twenty years ago trade was so bad on the Tyne that he couldn't get a job. Ever since, he's been telling himself that when trade got better he'd stay ashore. After the war he tried to get into a shipyard—went to the Labour Exchange, where they said: " Get the Boilermakers' Society to ask for you and we'll release you." The Boilermakers' Society said: " Get a shipyard to give you a job and we'll apply for you." The shipyard said: " We can't start you till the Labour Exchange have released you." After three weeks of this he gave it up—and he's still a steward. He now gets, including war bonuses, sixteen pounds odd a month. Before the war, he said, the shipowners treated them poorly—they often worked twenty hours a day in busy times and in slack times were flung on the dole. He said: " The Government did their best for us—it was capitalism that was at fault. The reason so many men are patriotic now is that men hope after this war things'll be better for 'em."

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I have been writing one or two sketches for an entertainment on board —one of them an aircraftman dictating a letter home in which he indulges his imagination on submarines he asserts we have sunk and air attacks we have repelled. But I may have under-estimated the lads' romantic powers, for one has already seen whales and sharks and multitudes of flying fish. However, I had barely finished being tickled by this when I, in fact, saw two flying fish—leaping out of the indigo sea like silver herrings and shooting along about 2 feet above the sea for 2 yards before diving in again. The mornings about six o'clock to eight are very lovely and the peace at midnight, when it is still not dark but the sea has turned grey with streaks of dark blue, and the sky is touched with cloud and the moon is as a golden pearl, is quieting to the heart. A padre said to me last night as we gazed over the waters: " You feel God is here."

The R.C. padre is indefatigable—he's up at 6 a.m. to say Mass and is busy most of the day giving instruction to the men who wish it, or hearing their troubles. He tells me how mixed they are: one is reading *Paradise Lost*, another Keats's poems, a third has written a letter of twenty-eight pages, mostly in criticism or appreciation of ten books he has read on the voyage, but others can find nothing to do but stare at the sea for eighteen hours a day. We have among the aircraftmen a professional golfer and several actors. At half-past seven this morning two officers were trotting determinedly round the boat-deck in running shorts and pumps.

We had some comical bridge last night, the R.C. padre and I against our two young doctors, who three times went three spades and each time came a cropper. Indeed, five successive times they bid and we defeated them. Much hilarity. I told the Wing-Commander as he sun-bathed yesterday: " Why anybody should pay you for doing this job I can't think "—and that applies with equal force to me. We are living a life for the moment that in peacetime we should pay a vast sum to enjoy.

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The cherubic doctor is in transports of delight because I have told him that when we reach Durban it will be Race Week. He is devoted to racing—his braces are littered with horses' heads. His idiosyncrasies are amusing—he shuns everything with currants in and all vanilla flavours. In some ways he is remarkably like a little boy, but he spends hours reading surgery and is, moreover, shrewd. In a group of young doctors he was telling us last night now he disposed of the out-patients at a London hospital. He gave them all some medicine which sounds like *diabolica*—a substance so unpleasant that those who had nothing wrong

with them never came again, and those with a neurosis it cured. There was one old lady who had been coming since 1906 and had a wad of papers an inch thick consisting of notes saying "Repeat." Finally a doctor (not himself) decided to look back through the documents to find the original medicine. It was one including arsenic. For thirty years she had been taking this medicine and for thirty years she had suffered from slight arsenical poisoning in consequence. They now stopped this medicine and she was thereupon cured.

They all spoke most highly of the Polish fighter airmen. One said: "At my station it had to be made a court-martial offence for flying back aircraft that were U.S. (unserviceable). They flew back machines with practically no fabric on them. We had to say, 'You must stop risking your life like this—you must bale out.' In Poland one shot down two Jerries, and doing so used all his ammunition; he then dived straight into a third and crashed them together, jumping out a half-second before the impact. They all say: 'We have nothing to lose, so what?'"

When this war is won the Poles, like other nations under the German harrow, are going to give us terrific problems. I find a general view on this ship among officers that the problems after the war is finished will far outweigh any now existing. Most expect utter European chaos; plagues and famines are not ruled out. The minds of many are in a kind of ferment. Meanwhile, the other doctor at my table, who said the other day, "The pilots are like gods," added yesterday that he thought it true to say many of them have no fear of death whatever—having lost so many friends already. He said he has felt the same thing: one day he had to go swiftly to a crash on his station, and he found he knew the men very well. One was the "met. man" (who goes up each day to take high temperatures) and the other a flight-lieutenant. They had collided. He said: "I felt there was no reason why I shouldn't have died like that. I haven't got it all worked out yet—there's a lot more thinking to be done about it." I wrote in 1915, being moved by so many fine young athletes having been killed in that war, that those men had made dying easier. My friend Raymond Walter, the poet, used to say: "Dying would be my trump card." He was killed.

I have been reading E. L. Mascall's *Man: His Origin and Destiny*—a small book on religious questions. Many of his statements are admirable—for instance: "We live in a world which is entirely upside down. It follows as a matter of course that Christianity is bound to be revolutionary. . . . It means putting an end to the profit motive as the main incentive in industry and to opportunism in politics. . . . God—man—things—money—is the only order that will work" (meaning that is

the order of importance. He asserts that at present we have reversed the order). He says there's no doubt that those fighting will find, as their fathers did, a comradeship they have never known in times of peace. " But it is hard to see why anyone should glory in this . . . it is a most gloomy and grisly exposure of the basic rottenness of our present social order. . . . The question is not simply one of giving people a minimum of physical comfort and trivial amusement. It is whether men and women in the back streets of Birmingham are living the sort of lives that should be led by the vice-gerents of God."

But when he speaks of birth-control (to which he is opposed) and divorce, he seems to me to be much less sensible. The Christian Church, he says, teaches that divorce is not wrong; it is *impossible*. He appears to argue that God is the third party to every marriage and that therefore no marriage can be dissolved. But surely some marriages are so unsuitable, or are entered into for base motives (marriages for money or convenience or ambition) that whether the parties call themselves Christians or not, or are married in church or not, the Almighty must be affronted by them, and can hardly be a party to them. Suppose a girl of twenty, for purposes of money, married a man of sixty-five. Is God a party to that ? Moreover, so many marriages turn out badly, and the household becomes a miniature hell, with disastrous effects on the children (if there are any such), that one would imagine God would be glad to see what has become a mockery brought to an end. (Just as a majority of men and women in Britain think it right to bring it to an end, if the parties so wish.)

This ship's captain, reprimanding yesterday one or two people for allowing a port-hole to be open at night, and threatening to screw them all up if it occurred again, told us of vessels torpedoed or bombed in this neighbourhood. The sea is so blue, the days so lovely, it is hard to believe in the dangers. All the same, most of us keep a haversack packed and our water-bottles full, and our lifebelts nearby.

Last night we played an absurd game called *Beetles*—you roll dice till you achieve a six and then draw the lower part of the body, the middle when you get a five and so on till the beetle is complete. I won the booby prize. At one table I never even made a beginning, not a whisker of the beetle. That was unique. Played some quoits in the afternoon, the Wing-Commander and I defeating the two padres; a fine game at which we improve. This morning there is wind and some cloud; a grand day; we might be off the English coast, it is so fresh (this was at 8 a.m.). Yesterday a shoal of fifty flying fish was seen. At midnight the sky was dotted with white fleecy clouds and smoke went straight up in a column. Eminently paintable.

* * * *

General de Gaulle, in his *Army of the Future*, writes that in swiftly moving mechanised warfare, " Initiative which was extolled in regulations but mistrusted in orders, will again become sovereign. Character, respected at the bottom, but feared at the top, will recover all its glory on the battlefield. . . . The effect of presence, which during the most gloomy of wars the most ardent of our leaders could not exert, will be restored by the motor and the flying machine."

I said two years ago that generals would not die in bed in this war.

* * * *

I've been writing a line or two for the compère to speak in front of my sketch " Letters Home " for the concert. Thus: " You may have wondered what the real purpose of this pleasure cruise is and we are now going to let you into a secret. The Government were well aware how behindhand most of us were with our letter-writing to wives and sweethearts, so they decided to put us aboard this ship so that we could without interruption—apart from boat drills, P.T., kit inspections, cleaning mess-decks, counting the flying fish, identifying whales and dodging fatigues—get right up to date. I am reliably informed by the censor that we are making pretty good progress. So far we have written fourteen million three hundred thousand letters and we are now getting into our stride. Those letters which are not lost by the post corporal will certainly be home in time for Christmas. Some men, when writing a letter, go to a remote part of the deck, get themselves into a contorted position with one leg round the back of their neck and their tongues well out, and forbid anybody to breathe in their vicinity. Our sketch, however, shows you another way of doing it."

During our boat-drill yesterday I suggested to the young pilot officer who will sail with me that we had better find out how many of our men cannot swim and put them into the boat first. Out of sixty-odd men thirty-one cannot swim. For an island race, I find that astonishing. These non-swimmers will, in future, line up in the front two ranks. There was laughter when this order was given.

The sandy, aquiline-visaged young doctor at my table has now twice won the sweep on the boat's run, and also the beetle competition. We had some amusing talk on horse-racing, particularly the Grand National. Cherub said it was a thing of beauty. I said, on the contrary, that when the milk-float was late in the morning I knew the horse had gone to run in the Grand National for his fifteenth time and that the Grand National is really the first stage in the life of a picador's nag. Cherub said he dreams winners every night in peacetime. He told us of being in the Inns of Court horse regiment some years ago. Camp was the devil—

they worked him so hard that for a week he never had time to go to the lavatory—swore this was correct.

Each night at eight o'clock the R.C. padre has an assembly of up to 100 men who ask him questions. He puts the questions in a hat and draws them out—usually puts one of his own in that will get a laugh and starts on that one—such as " I am in love with three blondes. What shall I do ? " One question was: " If I am captured in the East and know I shall be tortured, am I entitled to commit suicide ? " The R.C. reply is that life is the gift of God and you are never entitled to dispose of it. Suicide is, therefore, out of the question. If you are tortured and pray to God for strength, He will give it to you. That's what the martyrs did.

* * * *

I don't know whether the gentlemen who write about the tropics have been misleading us. We are not far from the Equator. The sea is the colour of the North Sea and a wind is blowing. Last night I took my sleeping bag and slept on the sun-deck. A broad ribbon of moonlight lay across the sea, the sky was strung and banked with piles of white and grey cloud; once or twice during the night a few fine drops of rain fell and two or three sleepers scuttered below. Throughout the darkness a breeze came across the blankets, the ship trembled, there was an occasional smell of oil, the ventilators murmured. Recumbent forms were as piles of washing on the deck. I didn't sleep well. I was too interested in the stars and the clouds and the changing sky; besides, I kept half-rolling off my inflated bed and my pillow was too low and I was too lazy to go in search of a second one.

The troops' concert was held last night in the lounge. Some of the aircraftmen were very fine. My Sheffield chauffeur and his pal made an entrance from the back, the first as Mr. Hitler. He'd borrowed a white jacket, a pair of gum-boots, made himself an iron cross and swastika and arranged his hair and stuck on a moustache. He spoke in cod German which his pal interpreted, said he had come through a port-hole which had been left open (there was a row about this offence a day or two back) and wanted to buy the housey-housey school from the two sergeants who run it. Earlier in the concert he had interrupted the show to walk across the stage with about 50 yards of thick rope, at the end of which came the hunchback of Notre Dame—another excellent make-up. The hunchback pulled one of his own teeth out and presented it to the compère. We had various choirs—male voice, swing, crooners; violinists, piano soloists, an actor who gave us the last scene from *The Case of the Frightened Lady*, and a Welshman who did an exquisitely funny imitation of two children. I had adapted the letter-scene from *Red Night* and an A.C.2

played the Cockney soldier admirably. Another sketch I wrote for a blimp major and a girl in the Far East showed that we have a veritable Billy Bennett as ship's adjutant. The fug in the lounge was superb and the beer was warm. Sweat streamed down the actors' faces and the fiddle string broke at the crucial moment. A good time was had by all.

Pukka Gen, the troops' magazine (one sheet), has come out. It has a joke new to me: Corporal: "Any man here write shorthand? You? Good. Hop up on the boat-deck—they're very shorthanded there."

* * * *

I was sleeping on the sun-deck at 3 a.m. to-day when the ship's engines stopped and we hove to. We were off the boom not far from port on the West Coast of Africa. It was beautifully light for that hour and a breath of wind stirred. A member of the crew walked past with a mug of tea; on the bridge ships' officers chatted like men who've just finished a job. This breakfast-time we are anchored not far off shore. Our romantic and ignorant minds had looked for a strip of sand, a palm-tree or two, a few tin huts—something inexpressibly arid. But this piece of shore might be France or Madeira or even England. The hills are wooded with green, and if natives with ebony-chocolate skins were not paddling near the ship in the slenderest canoes you ever saw, diving overboard into the oily sea for sixpences, shouting a bar of "Down Mexico Way" at us in their parrot-English, no man just waking up would know where, in fact, he had landed. The natives' feet are comic. They stick up with their big soles visible, soles which are not black, but yellow. (Cherub tells me that, similarly, negroes' hands he saw in hospitals are not black, but pinkish with black lines.)

An order to wear topees has just been issued. Mine is an enormous and ugly thing like a boat. My face beneath it shrinks to that of an attenuated child.

Last night we talked of baiting and cruelty at prep. and public schools. I had always thought this talk exaggerated, but both the young doctors thought not—both have had too much personal experience. The aquiline doctor said his father and mother were fearful that his brother would commit suicide, so utterly unhappy was he at his school (the school is quite well known). Every time he returned to school, the parting was rather awful. He himself never learned what the trouble was. Cherub gave us instances he saw of a boy being tied up with his feet to a beam. This boy, a butt, became so black and blue round the backside from pummelling that when it was thought Matron would see it, his behind was coated with pink tooth paste to hide the evidence. Another boy underwent punishment by having a padlock fastened to his testicles

for three days. Cherub added that a number of the other indignities to which boys were subjected were not to be described. I am quite sure he does not exaggerate; he is not that sort. The talk began by his having read something on this subject in Hugh Walpole's *Fortitude*.

The R.C. padre to whom I was denouncing the jiggery-pokery of ritual and incense-burning replied by saying: " You are a good Catholic gone wrong. You have the right ideas, but no foundation for them." (He didn't mean that he agreed with my denunciation, but with my views on other matters.) I said: " I have the foundation of experiences of a mixed life."

This morning I sat listening to the Scotch Church padre taking morning service. He wore a black cassock and a linen tie and looked like a disciple of John Wesley. His extemporaneous prayers were simple, sincere and to the point. He cited Edward Wilson on the Scott Antarctic expedition writing to his wife saying his happiest hours were spent alone in the crow's nest, alone with God and her, nothing above but the sky and nothing beneath but miles of ice. He went on to say that men are praying on this ship as they never did before, asking God to look after their loved ones at home.

I continue to be astonished at the food I eat. My shirt is sticking to my back, but for breakfast I had grape fruit, porridge, bacon and omelette, coffee, toast, butter and apricot jam.

* * * *

Two or three of the R.A.F. doctors have suggested that I should write on the misuse or inadequate use of their services. Some of them find they have too little to do at their flying stations and more especially too little important work, so that they are rusting, and fear how their lack of knowledge and experience will react on them after the war. One suggested they should be attached to a local hospital near the air station and work there in addition to the aerodrome. Moreover, they complain that much of their work—such as inspection of lavatories—could be quite well done by sanitary inspectors or even trained orderlies. On this ship nine doctors have each a few lavatories to inspect each day. We've had an operation for appendicitis during the voyage, have now some cases of prickly heat, a number of wax in the ears, some burns from the sun, and so forth. Nothing really serious. Last night I didn't sleep on deck. I am not inoculated against yellow fever (the War Office said I should not come near this place and thus an inoculation for fever was not required).

I asked the doctors whether it would be a good plan to have one medical service for the armed forces instead of three—R.A.M.C., Naval and Air Force. They thought it well might, that it would make for economy, and would allow a doctor tired of one service to transfer to

another. Apart from the study and problem of our flying personnel (as distinct from non-flyers), Air Force doctoring is much the same as doctoring with Army or Navy. One young doctor who was accustomed to treat varicose veins as long as seven years ago (when a student) has until recently been precluded from treating them in the R.A.F. Permission to treat has now been given, but the treatment prescribed (he asserts) is outmoded; for two years there's been a better one.

Cherub gave us an amusing description of how he was what he called a " king sucker " to a R.A.F. officer, who said: " Look, I can get you all the petrol you want if you'll lend me your car for a week." This man took the car and said to a second sucker: " Look, I'll take the pair of us in a car to Liverpool if you'll pay for dinner and a show"—which the man did. The dodger damaged the car and the petrol never materialised. At 5 a.m. yesterday Cherub was roused from sleep by a fellow officer who wanted a match to light his pipe.

At a time when smoking on deck was prohibited last night (rightly, I think) one or two other ships were ablaze with lights. At midnight lights shone ashore.

We are not allowed ashore. Going is quite impracticable—too many men, too few boats, too many flies, and so on. Through field glasses one can see a kind of negro compound. Nigger-boys continue to paddle round the ship, diving after coins thrown. They wish for silver, since that is easily seen. Their curses have been voluble when our lads have wrapped copper in silver paper. When the oil-tanker lay alongside, the buck niggers struggled on the hot plates after coins slung to them. The niggers turned up to work in violent reds and yellows and greens and purples—vivid as posters—but now they are wearing greasy boiler suits. Their ships' officers are in white shorts and long white stockings. This tanker has a chicken hatch on the aft deck, with hens clucking; their egg supply.

To-day is a griller. The hot deck burns through one's leather-soled shoes.

Yesterday we got the special announcement about our military pact with Russia. A fair amount of cynicism about this: " The sort we had with France just before she collapsed " is a view many hold. But I'm very glad of the pact. It will make it a little more difficult at all events for Russia to throw her hand in. With the Syrian campaign ended for the time being and knowing of the heat in Libya, it begins to look doubtful if the Middle East will be lively till mid-September or so. But it's all speculation.

By 9.10 a.m. I have breakfasted. I have now fifteen hours before going to bed—fifteen hours to do nothing, and it will take me all my

time to squeeze in an hour's work; so much of nothing is there to do. Judging from my cards at bridge, I am a close relation of Lord Yarborough.

* * * *

The troops' magazine asked if I could let them have something. So I sent them this:

On Shipboard

(*a*) Soldier, think not war will end
In spring or in the fall,
Nor dwell on how the world will mend.
Best not to think at all.

(*b*) Full fathom five my brother swings
Who sailed this sea where fish have wings
He had no luck; God give me plenty,
For he is old, and I'm but twenty.

(*c*) Here on the hard deck I will lie
While cloud and wind and sea go by,
And I'll not sleep till the moon goes down,
I'll think on my love in London Town.

I sent the following also, but on second thoughts, crossed it out:

The Pilot

His world the skies, his life a god's,
He saves us all who are but clods.
We live and draw an earthy breath;
He conquers and his prize is death.

To-day I accompanied our concert party to another troopship. This ship holds tank men and infantry, is much older than ours, much fuller, and with far less space for officers to play deck games. Indeed, I saw nowhere where this was possible. Transit was difficult and from half-hour to half-hour our going was fixed, cancelled, postponed. Finally a ship's boat came for us and we crowded in. Our pianist was then missing and we sat grilling for twenty minutes till he turned up, a dozen officers among us. Discipline in the R.A.F. is curious. Two days ago an Army officer on this ship who was in charge of a squad on parade told me how flabbergasted he was when, on hearing one or two guns go off,

his men were so curious that without any permission they all left parade and ran to the other side of the ship to see what was afoot. My aquiline doctor rebuked a man during boat-drill for drinking out of his water bottle. The sergeant said: " You can't stop a man from drinking, sir." I remain convinced that nothing short of stern discipline is any good among troops. In crisis it holds men together; a man wants something to lean on, and discipline affords it. But officers must be sternly disciplined also. When men are bad it is the officers' fault. It is a poor example when senior officers issue orders and fail to carry out those orders themselves. I have seen this several times during this war. I have walked round battalions and batteries with the C.O. or major and undergone the uncomfortable experience of seeing men salute us a dozen or twenty times—fine, smart salutes—and the C.O. or major has ignored them. This is insulting to the men. Lord Gort was punctilious in returning salutes, as every good officer is.

Were I in charge of this ship, I would issue an order that in no circumstances must a man proceed faster than a walk. Running would be sternly forbidden. Nothing creates alarm more. There ought to be an order directing people to keep to the left in corridors. If we were torpedoed, men would get jammed in passages.

To return to the concert. The Empress of Abyssinia and her daughter are going out to Addis Ababa on that troopship. The Empress sat on a sofa listening to our hilarities and ribaldries, but understanding nothing of it. Her daughter, however, who is in our British Red Cross, speaks English well. She gave some autographs.

The fashion in which Sheffield men turn up is remarkable. A corporal in the armoured corps who runs the concert on our sister ship asked me if I knew him. I said I was afraid not. He said: " I was on the *Sheffield Telegraph*. I came to your hotel to take pictures of you when you came to Sheffield." The man who plays the padre in the sketch I've written is a relative of the founder of that journal, and worked at one time as a sub-editor on the paper.

One of the nigger-boys in his canoe calls himself " Black-out." " Throw a tanner for Black-out!" he cries. Most of the water and oil tankers and bumboats that come alongside are partly staffed with negroes. Our lads have a good deal of fun with them. The Sheffield chauffeur joined them in his Hitler boots to scramble for the pennies; there was a regular scrum.

To-night the sheet lightning was as spectacular as stage effects. A mist rose and the humid heat gave us almost for the first time an impression of how unhealthy this coast may be.

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The ship's padre was asked by some of the men whether a padre was right to give his life for wounded men when, in any case, there was little he could do for them. He found this an awkward problem, only really to be resolved by the dead padre himself. The R.C. padre said to me: " My own course would be quite plain. If any wounded man had not received the sacrament it would be my duty on pain of sin to stay to give it to him. My own life is of no account—it is God's already. It is for this reason, among others, that we priests do not marry—being single we are not torn between our duty to wives and children and our duty to sufferers. If men are suffering from infectious disease—say, plague or leprosy—we can go among them readily, whereas married men might not be able to do so with minds at rest."

The ship's padre talked to me of China, where he worked as a missionary and will return as soon as he can. He said they make good Christians. There's a saying that the head and tail of China are Christian (possibly more Christians are in the Government of that country than in governments elsewhere, he said), but in between, the solid body of China has a good deal of devil-worship. Buddhism and Confucianism flourish, too. He spoke highly of the moral code of Confucianism. He found the Chinese honourable and truthful. They'll haggle for two hours over the price of coolies, but once the bargain is struck they don't go back on it. Similarly, coolies may lag behind on the trek, but they always come along in the end; they don't bunk. I asked him about brigandage. He said that most of them turn brigands only when crops have failed; they may turn brigands for one day, stop all travellers on a road and take money and supplies from them—and then begin farming again. Numerous wars have left arms behind. Speaking of the language, he said that after about a year he managed to take a simple morning service in Chinese. Was it true, I asked, that the same word has different meanings according to pitch of voice and rhythm. He said it is; for instance, the word that means " pig " on one tone, means " lord " on another. The sentence that talks of roast pork and apple sauce, when pitched differently, means " If you appeal to the Lord, he will give help " (or something of that sort).

The aquiline doctor tells me pilots sometimes suffer from " airman's stomach." They get pain and discomfort, possibly vomiting or diarrhœa. It is a form of nervous trouble. One of our best aces suffers in that way. Not long ago, a pilot went to hospital with this disability and was down in the mouth about it, but in hospital found himself occupying the next bed to this famous ace and was so delighted about it that he promptly got better. (Professional golfers suffer from this kind of stomach; so, too,

do public speakers and actors in perhaps a less degree. Dyspepsia is a modern ailment that grows chronic—nervous strain the reason.)

The Wing-Commander said to-day: " Trafalgar wasn't in it with the Battle of Britain. The Germans had all set for the invasion." He was on the inside of things and said that for two months he hardly slept.

The ship's padre has an atheist for steward. On the first morning it took the steward twenty minutes to answer the bell. Then he said: " You're not the only officer on the ship." The ship's padre said: " If atheism is your creed, why don't you live up to it and show what a good creed it is ? " Since then the steward has been most attentive, and has insisted on cleaning the padre's buttons, refusing to allow the batman to do it.

Cherub has an amusing account of his first prep. school. He was eight years old at the time. He said they did pretty well what they liked and a lot was expected of them. For instance, when end of term came, the Matron said: " You had better go and do your packing now." He said: " Of course, I had never packed and simply didn't know how to. Another boy said: ' Oh, I love packing—I'll pack for you.' I said: ' Will you really ? ' I landed home with one pyjama jacket out of three sets of pyjamas."

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Two armourer sergeants who have been survivors from a torpedoed ship have given me their accounts of what occurred.

The first said: " I was sleeping on deck. It wasn't a big explosion when the torpedo hit us, nothing like what you'd expect—there were two of 'em, one got the bunkers. I had only to sit up and I was there, so to speak. I got up and went on the poop, aft, and smoked a cigarette. The captain shouted she wouldn't go down for about three hours. Anyhow, she went down by the head till the deck was about level with the water and there she remained, and she was very steady. I saw the starboard lifeboats lowered. The ship was still doing about six knots, and owing to that and to the fact that one end of the lifeboat didn't unloose, the boat slewed round and tipped up and sent the people into the water. Two other boats got down all right, but before they reached the water, the topmost one swung across the lower one and killed about three people. Another ship had been about half a mile away and she came down and put her bow close to our stern, and I stood there giving men a helping push to get them across the narrow gap. The sea was calm, but as the other ship stood by she rose and fell about five feet. Finally, she had to move away and no more could jump on to her. Meanwhile, some rafts had been thrown into the sea. Suddenly the ship began to go down

very swiftly by the head and her stern rose. I then jumped into the water —about seventy feet, I should say. I held down my kapok lifejacket as I struck the water, but even so the shock was quite a bit. I was lucky enough to go in upright. Some who went in flatter hurt their lungs and chest. There would be about 400 of us in the water. I swam about for an hour and three-quarters. When the ship's boilers blew up—she was under the sea by then—I felt a gripping sensation round the waist as though somebody had got hold of me, and that happened again when the depth charges went off. The corvette was doing that about quarter of a mile off. There was no singing from chaps in the water, but a lot of joking such as 'Come on, Cambridge!' as rafts went by with men paddling them. The paddling wasn't always good—some went round in circles. Similarly, when a boat was lowered the rowers sent it back towards the ship. Some men burnt their hands by sliding down ropes into the water. On the whole the behaviour of everybody I saw was very good. We didn't know any men had been lost or that men were wounded down below, and so we were all very cheerful. Being told the ship wouldn't sink for three hours kept everybody calm. I didn't see anything heroic, but everybody just helped everybody else when they could. On the ship that picked me up, we slept on deck. They hadn't much but biscuits and bully and tea, but on the armed cruiser which took us off, they could naturally fix us up better. The sailors there subscribed £33 to give us cigarettes, and we had an issue of twenty every day. On our way here after being rescued, we heard we were chased by twenty-one submarines. Don't know how true that is, but we heard a lot of depth charges going off nearly every day; one day we had six sub. scares."

This is not the first time this sergeant has been rescued in this war. He was on the *Lancastria* when she was sunk by bombing at St. Nazaire. He said: "I was on the aft deck that time, too. She rolled over with a terrible list and we just walked down the slope into the water. A major standing by me asked: 'Can you swim?' I said 'Yes.' He went on: 'I can't. My wife's going to be peeved,' and he walked into the sea and went straight down. Swimming was bad, because about three inches of oil lay on top of the water. I was in the sea about the same length of time as the other day, and when I got on a destroyer a big chap said to me, 'Have you swallowed any oil?' and when I said, 'Yes,' he punched me in the stomach—quite a big clout—to make me sick. They kept giving us stuff to make us sick till we'd vomited all the oil up."

The second sergeant of the torpedoed ship said he was sleeping in his hammock in the hold when he was wakened up. He went on deck and hung about a bit and then walked to the stern as the fellow ship came alongside and was the first man to jump aboard her. This sergeant was in the Borough Analyst's Department at Warrington. Both he and the

first sergeant are fine types, perfectly calm and steady and good-humoured. The first sergeant, a Londoner, said: " If we get torpedoed again, all I'm frightened of is the sharks nibbling my toes." I said: " On the law of averages, you can't be sunk again. I regard you as a mascot for us."

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At breakfast we talked of surgical operations. Until about 1830 there were no anæsthetics at all; opium might have been used, but nobody realised how efficacious it could be. Extracts from the plant mandrake were tried (mandrake had several superstitions attached to it). About this time a famous libel action was brought by a Mr. Bransby Cooper, a surgeon at Guy's, against the *Lancet*. Mr. Cooper had operated on a farm labourer for stone in the bladder, but the man had died. The *Lancet* was apparently scathing about Mr. Cooper's alleged incompetency—the operation had taken some fifty-five minutes; in those days, speed was the essence of the matter, since the patient was shouting with agony all the time. Mr. Cooper was the nephew of a famous surgeon, Sir Ashley Cooper, and when everything was going wrong and Mr. Cooper couldn't find the stone, he cried, " Bring me my uncle's knife," possibly thinking that would afford him inspiration. It was about this period that an American (a dentist, I think) discovered the use of gas as an anæsthetic and after some experiments gave a public demonstration — but unhappily the man died and the use of gas was put back many years.

It was Lister who introduced the use of sterilisation into operations—about 1860 or so. His custom was to douse everything with carbolic, a dangerous substance, but an improvement on no sterilisation at all. What man has achieved in surgery over a period of not much more than a century is more than remarkable.

The ship's padre is trying to control the playing of housey-housey. This " school " is run by sergeants, who, the padre thinks, rent it from a warrant officer. Those who run it make a steady profit from the takings, a commission on the cards sold. That commission, in the padre's view, is much too high—about 20 per cent. instead of 5 per cent. Some of the lads have been pawning wrist watches to get funds to play and there has been a small amount of thieving. I must say I dislike the notion of warrant officers or sergeants making a profit out of their men in this fashion.

De Gaulle in the *Army of the Future*, quotes Pascal as summing up the condition of human beings in three words, " inconstancy, boredom, anxiety," and he prophesied the passion for travel. . . . Clearly, says de Gaulle, the profession of arms can supply this want as no other can. In another passage he says the ardour of France's mercenaries (he is

speaking of a former age) was damped down by the misery of unwanted discipline or a desire to give nothing except in proportion to their meagre pay. He goes on: "Yet if the properties of arms could make of these men the heroes of Fontenoy, of Constantinople, of Sebastopol, what could not be made to-morrow of 100,000 picked lads, ranged behind the banners of their own free choice?"

An interesting problem, this of volunteers and conscripts. On Nelson's *Victory* only about one in eight was a volunteer; the rest were pressed men. A few were negroes, a few Frenchmen. In 1916 some of us in my battalion thought but little of the conscripts who came to fill the gaps in our ranks. But it was these who, later on, broke the Hindenburg Line. In an emergency one would sooner be with volunteers than pressed men, yet the conscripts appear to do quite well; indeed, the general level may be better under conscription, for the good will leaven the bad, whereas under a voluntary system the finest will go first in a bunch and be killed first and what comes after be poor. And yet, even voluntarism can be less voluntary than it seems. In September, 1914, I asked the men in my platoon why they had joined up. Unemployment, quarrels with wives, boredom—these accounted for a good many in Kitchener's Army. Only half a dozen out of fifty confessed idealism.

De Gaulle says: "The most different armies constitute, by their community of instinct and of tradition, the truest 'International.' In it there is a store of moral capital which no nation can reject without forgetting itself." And, later, he says: "There has been no illustrious captain who did not possess taste and a feeling for the heritage of the human mind. At the root of Alexander's victories one will always find Aristotle."

We are now near the Equator. The morning is beautifully fresh with a wind, a grey-blue sea, sky with some cloud. Altogether we might be off Bournemouth.

* * * *

We crossed the Equator some days ago, but to-day had the Crossing the Line ceremony. The men's swimming bath on the aft deck was used —5 feet of water. O.C. troops turned up as Father Neptune in tin crown, trident, straw-coloured beard, and a flight-lieutenant played the Queen. Our Sheffield chauffeur played the butcher; he had furnished himself with kidneys, sausages and so forth, and these he extracted from the victims' pants, dosed the victims with physic, and handed them over to the barber, who had his bucket of whitewash and yard-long razor. We had concocted various grave charges; the Warrant Officer for running housey-housey, the ship's M.O. for taking out an appendix, an aircraftman for running raffles, a flying officer for wearing his Mae

West. The lines were broad (I had given some to the O.C. troops himself), and it emerged the O.C. would have been put up to raffle, but it was thought no tickets would be bought. The O.C. took this in good part. The best moment was when the ship's Chief Officer embraced the Queen and fell into the bath with her. Finally, the O.C. and court officials all broke into argument and the lot dived into the pool. The troops' delight at the discomfiture of the Warrant Officer and the organiser of raffles was deep; easy to see where sympathies lie—or don't lie; indeed, the ceremony has its points at meting out justice. But it shows, too, the spirit that took our forefathers to witness executions. The comedian was rather too ruthlessly dealt with—made something of a spectacle of.

The weather grows cooler. The day we crossed the line was delightful—much less hot and more breeze than we had expected. The swimming bath—I have been swimming the past few days—was 76 degrees last night. Two days ago it was 84 degrees. I've been trying to teach the R.C. padre to swim. He can now get halfway across. Last night he and I took five bob off O.C. troops at bridge. At midnight the dark sea was lit with stars of phosphorescence, as though a piece of the sky had dropped into the water. I had not witnessed this before. The other ships in our convoy sailed in a patch of ghostly light—from our boat-deck this strip of cold grey shining light was clearly visible. One or two folk thought it unfortunate, fearing submarines would see it. But I think we are past the submarine cruising area. Anyhow, nothing can be done about it.

Our Chief Steward was wounded when this ship was bombed at a British port not long ago. But although he was in hospital for some time with the wound, he did not know he was wounded at all until the day after he was hit. The shrapnel penetrated his leg but, he said, there was no mark on his stocking where it entered. (Presumably it was a fragment and was white hot or red hot.) On this voyage a small piece of fractured bone has worked its way out.

A deck-hand, old, weather-beaten face, eyes scarcely discernible, who tied up the deck-tennis net for me the other day, has a brother who was a general in the White Russian army, and a son or grandson in our British Navy. He himself has been at sea fifty-nine years—forty years with this steamship line.

* * * *

We had some talk at breakfast on our dependence on food at pretty regular intervals. I said I find this humiliating; we ought long ago to have schooled ourselves to eating once a day. Moreover, the intolerable messes with which we fill our stomachs are surely ridiculous. Imagine mixing up in a heap grapefruit, porridge, egg and bacon, marmalade and coffee and consuming it; we should be revolted. Yet that is what we

do a few moments later. I said we are really very comic animals, with our false teeth and our spectacles and with parts of our faces shaven and parts unshaven, dressed in our funny little shirts and socks and what not. If we saw a lot of mice running about, some with a wisp of straw round their middles not speaking to those who had not the wisp of straw and even using different lavatories, we should be highly amused. Yet that is what we do. The aquiline doctor said that we have generalised most parts of our bodies; some parts are inferior to those of most animals; for instance, our intestinal system is inferior to that of the rabbit. The only two things we have achieved, he said, in the animal world, is to walk upright and develop a large brain.

The boyishness and irresponsibility that is in the British character keeps cropping out. After our Crossing the Line ceremony yesterday about ten of us gathered for a cocktail. One of our party was celebrating his birthday. During the joking, his trousers were taken down. The trousers of the Adjutant were thereupon removed also, but he managed to make himself very comical—strange as, in cold blood, that sounds. Last night a voice over the loud-speaker announced that at nine o'clock the First-class passengers would be invited to contribute 2*s*. each towards a drink pool and to take part in a "Boozey sing-song," which duly began—the old songs, such as "Down at the old Bull and Bush," "Maddymoselle of Armenteers" and "Tipperary" being in the van. As the evening wore on, the stuff got broader. By the time I passed the lounge after tramping the deck, the song was bawdy indeed, or, rather, not so much bawdy in the Shakespearian sense (which I hold to be permissible) but something beyond. This is unfortunate, for a microphone was being used and aircraftmen sleep just off the lounge.

In the afternoon I had the job of giving the first of a series of short lectures; spoke for twenty-five minutes and then answered some questions. One of them: What did I think of the new Minister of Information, Brendan Bracken? I replied I didn't know Bracken, but that I hoped, inasmuch as Bracken had been Churchill's private secretary, that he will continue to work in the closest touch with the Prime Minister and that the M.O.I. may thus acquire more authority over the Service departments than it has had in the past. Another question was: How do journalists regard Mr. J. L. Garvin? A third: Why were the *Daily News* and *Daily Chronicle* combined? A fourth: Why did newspapers mislead the public about the internal conditions in Germany, suggesting that Germany was short of raw materials. I replied that most of us have a high regard for Garvin, whether we agree or disagree with his views; that I disliked newspaper combinations and syndicates, and would prefer that a man owned only one and that its circulation should not exceed half a million; and that newspapers are not omniscient, and that if Baldwin, with all the resources of the Secret Service at his disposal, was

so woefully wrong about Germany's rearmament, newspapers could not always be right about the enemy's supply of raw materials. All the questions came from men, as distinct from officers. Later I found a group of men (formerly actors) rehearsing Synge's *Shadow of the Glen*. They are hoping to do the fourth act of *The Merchant of Venice* too.

My table companions—the two doctors and the padre—and I had some discussion on ruthlessness in war. The two doctors are inclined to think a British airman who has forced an enemy bomber into the sea and who sees the German crew climb out on the wings should machine-gun them. Why allow them to survive merely because they are now in the sea? The padre and I argued that to do that is to lose some spiritual force that is not at all counterbalanced by dispatching that handful of enemy. If you concede shooting them thus, where will you stop? You will have to go the whole hog of German frightfulness. I said that in logic you can excuse the German method of bombing hospital ships, for why permit the wounded to recover so that they shall once again fight you? If it is legitimate to kill a whole man, why boggle at killing half a man? If you may torpedo a troopship, why hesitate to polish off a man who escapes the torpedo and is swimming in the water? But if you concede all that, then your attitude is German, you depart from the British tradition, and part of the principles for which we are fighting this war are vanished for ever. We had best remain somewhat illogical and humane. Nelson's prayer before Trafalgar, "May humanity after victory be the predominant feature of the British Fleet," should be our watchword.

As I tramped the deck last night I found the thought of being incarcerated in the Middle East or Russia or the Far East for a year or two most obnoxious, and I realised how much the German soldiers scattered over Europe among a resentful population and with small hope of leave must long for the war to end that they may go home. Our Anzacs and Canadians must be in similar case, except that they are among friends, or friendly peoples.

I am not impressed by the appointment of Duncan Sandys, Churchill's son-in-law, as Parlimentary Secretary for the War Office, nor, in a sense, by Bracken at the M.O.I. The appointment of a relative can only be justified when his qualities clearly rise above those of any other possible candidates for the job. Who could say that of Sandys? If Churchill practises shoving members of his personal entourage into jobs, he will be foolish. I hope the Radical papers are saying what they think about it. The War Office is now run by Margesson, the former Tory Whip, Croft, the ardent Tory reactionary, and Sandys—an indifferent bunch. I much doubt if Duff Cooper is the best man to go to the Far East to take

charge. No need to find him a job elsewhere merely because he was Minister of Information, and no shining one. This swopping about of Ministers is the subject of much criticism among the more lively-minded officers.

The aquiline doctor has been talking to me about the problem of marriage. A good many young pilots get married, and marriage interferes with and lowers their efficiency. Some C.Os. at stations approve of it, some disapprove. A pilot is supposed to ask his C.O's. permission to marry. If he does not, the C.O. can make it uncomfortable for him or send him out East (for, from time to time, C.Os. are asked to submit names of men to go). But while marriage may impair efficiency, there's no doubt that these young pilots are excellent men to beget children. It would be fine, in a sense, if each of them begot several children. But from whom? And married, or unmarried? (In Germany advertisements appear in the newspapers: " So and so, off to the Front, would like to leave a son behind him.") But, at all events, it ought not to be left to individual C.Os. to say whether we, as a nation, approve our pilots getting married or not. Coupled with this is the question of widows' pensions. Near some of our air stations, the widows of dead pilots still live, young attractive women, drawing their pension, nothing to do, and some of them doing nothing—in theory, grief-stricken widows, but in fact a proportion of them nothing of the sort, but young gold-diggers who've thriven on a small period of licensed harlotry. A harsh verdict, but not unjust in certain cases. A suitable subject for a Maugham play.

The news from the Far East suggests Japan is about to launch out on new aggression (or is it bluff?). Maybe I shall find myself continuing on this ship to Singapore.

The ship's wireless officer (a Yorkshireman) spoke to me of his regret that more middle-class British people don't travel. The travellers are so often the wrong sort of British folk—those who throw their weight about and look on our Dominions as poor relations. In South Africa, he said, men employed in banks, insurance offices and the like can accumulate leave (in addition to two or three weeks' annual leave) and thus travel to England.

He served in Palestine in the last war. He said: " I see the same sorts of lads wearing the same sorts of topees on board, and I almost expect some of my old pals to come walking round the coner." He added: " You must have found it strange to be going over the old ground in France." Talking with us was the Editor of *Pukka Gen*, who was formerly Art Editor of the *Yorkshire Evening Post*. He is in the boat section of the R.A.F. It seems we now have some rescue boats anchored out off our coast on which shot-down airmen find, among other things, a wireless

to communicate with the shore. At the back of the boat is a ramp running down into the sea, up which the airmen can crawl if too weak to climb the short ladder at each side of the bow. He said he had come across only two German airmen his boat rescued. In each case all the men could say was " Ver cold." Each of them was nearly dead, although they had been in the sea only fifteen minutes. This was in winter.

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Have I seen the whale? Have I seen the albatross? A senior officer denies it is an albatross, but it is thought this denial arises from the fact that he did not see it first. An aircraftman saw the whale blowing (he says). All this led to Cherub giving us a dissertation on birds in the Shetlands. " The most interesting of them," he said, " and the best flier is the fulmar. It's possessed of immense curiosity and comes and flies round you. If you take no notice of it, it dislikes being ignored, and comes even closer. But what it likes best is having stones thrown at it, especially if they whistle close by its head. The whistle apparently pleases it; by throwing stones at a fulmar, you can get them to come to within a few feet of you. They're beautiful fliers. I've seen them fly at a great speed right up to within a foot of the face of a cliff and then bank and pass the cliff, almost scraping its face with their wing tip." He spoke of the gorging propensities of seagulls. " If you throw a mutton chop with a bone in it six inches long they'll swallow it right off without any apparent difficulty. The only thing I've seen get the better of them in that way was some very glutinous dumplings we had one day—you know the kind I mean, you shove your knife in and the dumpling meets over the top of the knife. Well, I threw one of these dumplings and a big gull swallowed it. Almost at once, it realised something was wrong. It went and sat on one side and a pained look came over its face. It sat there for a long time motionless and very sad; then it tried to take off—this was a difficult proceeding with the dumpling inside, but, anyhow, it got off at last. When I threw the second dumpling, a gull plunged its beak into it, trying to peck it, and the dumpling stuck on its beak and it sat with its head cocked on one side wondering what to do. Usually when you throw anything at all, there's a great flurry and scurry among them to get it, but when I threw the third dumpling they all sort of had a look at it and sheered off, frightened of it." The puffin, he said, is a most remarkable flier—it steers and banks with its feet, which are bright yellow; you see these yellow feet, as yellow as the wheels of an old hansom cab, sticking out as he flies. The skua is found in the Shetlands, too—a comparatively small bird which attacks gannets twice its size. The gannets become panic-stricken and frequently disgorge the food they've recently eaten (gulls are prone to do this, too, when pursued), and the skuas get the meal they are looking for."

The subject of prayer cropped up. The R.C. padre, of course, believes God answers prayers and that praying for another person may be equally effective. I said: " Isn't it attributing far too human a quality to God to imagine He will do something merely because He is asked? Do you suggest He is going to say to Himself: ' I'm not going to save John Smith because John Smith hasn't asked Me to save him '? Not even a human being of high quality would behave in that childishly human fashion. If God is the just being He is given credit for, He will do what is just and right, whether He is asked or not."

Air-Marshal Brooke-Popham was formerly C.O. of a group in which the aquiline doctor served. The Air-Marshal was being entertained to dinner by one of the officers, who carefully explained to their solitary maid the etiquette of announcing the guests. However, on the night she got somewhat flurried and when the chief guest turned up she opened the door of the lounge and announced, " Air Popham," and scurried off.

We are back into normal suits, having discarded drill. Sea and sky are grey. Much uncertainty whether we are bound for Cape Town or Durban and almost as much secrecy, as though we are all able to send wireless messages straight to Hitler telling him where we are. This passion for secrecy grows and is an amusing sidelight on the human desire for prestige. If you know something others don't know, your stature increases. This is one reason, no doubt, why bureaucrats delight in censorship and marking documents " Secret."

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I spent a couple of hours yesterday accompanying the Chief Steward on a tour of kitchens, stores and so forth. Nobody could imagine, walking the decks, what lies beneath. We went into cold stores, where you shiver —the temperature is 17 degrees. Cod and ling are as hard as blocks of wood and coated with frost. (As I came out of one I caught my head a devil of a crack on the roof, but happily I seem to have a hard skull.) Victualling this ship is a job; we consume 1,600 lb. of meat a day and 400 lb. of tea a week. All the milk is fresh—that is, it is sterilised bottled milk that will keep six months or more. The only unsatisfactory article on our menu is the cup of tea; it is lifeless. The steward said it is because the water is always boiling and (I gather) the carbon dioxide goes out of it. We are plentifully stocked with cigarettes, tobacco, wines, etc. We've got 150,000 tins of Player's cigarettes (fifty in a tin), about 50,000 tins of Gold Flake and 40,000 tins of Waverley cigarettes. Four ounces of Three Nuns tobacco costs 3*s.* 6*d.*; 50 Gold Flake, 1*s.* 8*d.* In the printer's shop (one compositor) they showed me the new menus they were preparing just before war started. Our present menu is

elaborate—eight-course dinner, if you wish. The peacetime menu was about four times as rich, and the new one in preparation half as long again. Man never knows when to stop. What's that about digging graves with our teeth? The little old compositor said: " It was the German and Italian ships forcing us into it. Let's hope when the war's over they'll be finished for good"—meaning enemy shipping lines. Menus are prepared two days ahead. Bread is baked every day; we eat rolls the same day, bread the day following. There was a grand smell in the bakery and in the kitchens, too. I asked the chef how they get on in the hot weather. " Change clothes three times a day," he said. But he would make two of me. He's been at sea over twenty years, the Chief Steward forty-three years, the printer over twenty years, and so they go. I don't think any of them would be sorry to get a shore job. It's quite likely that they'll get no letters for five or six months. None can catch them up.

This ship, compared with living in Britain, is a veritable treasure-house of good things, mostly drawn from South Africa. Some folk here feel we are living too well. However, none knows when he'll see home again.

We've half a dozen civilians on the ship—two of them Office of Works men seconded to the Air Ministry to look after " works and bricks." One of them takes a very poor view of contractors' rackets. Another civilian is off to Sydney to help run some of our troopships. Among his former jobs was to go to New York as advance party to the *Queen Elizabeth*. They kept the secret of her going very well—booked rooms at Southampton hotels as though she were moving there from the Clyde; the pilot who took her down the Clyde was not allowed to disembark, but taken to New York. But at 3 p.m. on the day before the ship reached New York, a New York paper came out with a banner-line—" *Queen Elizabeth* nearing New York." She was about 450 miles off then and in a danger zone. There are too many Americans who'll rank a front-page story higher than helping us to win the war. I felt that about some of their war correspondents in France, likeable as they all were. One or two thought battles ought to be staged to give them a story.

(The grey sea looks calm, but there's a swell underneath, and we are rolling quite a bit as I write this. The grey-silver light from the sun is lovely—like the Arctic. The bugle has just sounded " Fall in A, fall in B, etc." The R.A.F. bugling is atrocious. I haven't heard a single call that has been sounded correctly. However, the R.A.F.'s important work is not blowing bugles or forming fours.)

Another of our civilians was formerly purser in the Cunard Line. He's been seven times round the world. His ship was in New York when war broke out and was promptly painted grey and turned into an armed merchant cruiser. After doing seven or eight patrols, she was torpedoed

about 2.30 in the afternoon of a brilliant June day, 1940. Only four men were killed—one of them an engineer, who was washed down the engine-room ladders after getting all the ships' engineers out; another, a man who was naked, having a sponge down. My informant said: " We had about 450 of a crew. We kept afloat about twenty-four hours, but none of us knew we should do so, and yet there was no evidence of worry. I remember thinking about half an hour after we were torpedoed that my wife and youngsters would probably be lying on a beach somewhere without the foggiest notion what had happened to me. But that was all. The U-boat came up and fired a second torpedo at us, missing by four feet. Then she surfaced again about a mile away. Our guns kept banging away at her, but I don't know if we hit her. Our wireless had gone phut when the engines stopped, and it took us some time to fix up an alternative. When we did so, we got a message back from the Admiralty that we should get an aircraft over about 6.15 p.m., and sure enough, about that time, a flying-boat arrived on the horizon. He came over and signalled, ' Are you all right ? ' which struck us as rather funny. Destroyers came next morning and a tow was fixed, but some hours later we had to abandon the ship, and she went down almost at once as soon as the tow rope was taken off." He said this torpedoing was less upsetting than a collision he had been in previously—on a night that was pitch black with an oily sea and rain falling. They ran at full speed into another cruiser; he was flung out of his bunk against a bulkhead and back to the floor near the bunk, bruised all over. Their bows were curled round like a dog's tail. They made port all right and got repaired.

He shows no sign of his adventures. Escapes from death are like water on a duck's back to most men. The R.A.F. lads who escaped a torpedoing ten days ago are now merely proud of the fact—it's something to write home about or, rather, to recount after the war. Writing home is once more in full spate. Romancing is in flower. One lad has described how he went ashore for a couple of hours at our last port (no one did).

I met the Captain yesterday—a Yorkshireman from Whitby; looks sixty, grey, small grey-blue eyes, never had his clothes off for the first fortnight of this voyage. He looks on Germany's communiqués of their air losses as all moonshine. I often wonder who the writers of these communiqués think are taken in by them. In his view, if Japan takes Indo-China, war between us and Japan is certain sooner or later—Indo-China is only 700 miles away from Singapore. I find it hard to believe that Japan will undertake war with us and U.S.A. after her four years of war with China.

Last night we had our second ship's concert—from 8 p.m. till 11.30 p.m.—about an hour too much of it. Fresh talent was unearthed, and some of it was capital. The star turn was a pilot officer who acted a

sketch all by himself, playing a scene in the desert between a woman and two rival R.A.F. officers fighting for her hand, achieving this by swopping from one hat to another. He is a short dark chap (half French, I believe), cultivated, amusing, rather what the North calls " La di da." The troops were entranced. The Sheffield chauffeur again distinguished himself in a " Dance of the Seven Towels " a strip-tease act, disclosing his breasts painted in the R.A.F. red, white and blue circles and with a swastika on his behind. He danced with real grace. The song I had done for " Three British Officers " was much improved by the business the three chaps gave it, but the verse for the Army officer—

" For spit and for polish I'm known near and far.
If our buttons aren't bright, how can we win the war ?
I instinctively know how a man fights and shoots
By the cut of his hair and the shine on his boots "—

got somewhat entangled in falling moustaches and lost monocles. It's a pity the officers don't contribute a higher percentage of the programme and provide the compére. I cannot think it's good for discipline to have an aircraftman as compére calling on the C.O. to say a few words.

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From nine o'clock till eleven last night I sat with the Captain in his room beneath the bridge. He was reading an illustrated paper when I arrived—not much more than enough light to read by. His is a lonely life. He never comes into the dining-room or lounge. He dials " 08 " on his telephone when he wants a drink—usually a pink gin. He sits about till midnight—it is very dark till then. After the moon has risen he turns in. That is, when life is quiet. Otherwise, he doesn't turn in. As we sat talking, the tread of the officer of the watch was going overhead as steady as a loud clock ticking—eight paces this way, a turn and eight paces back, almost ceaselessly for the four hours. " If he stops, I go out to see what's going on," said the Captain. " If I'm asleep and he stops his pacing, I wake up." The Captain is about fifty-nine. He has about 2,000 lives in his care and a ship worth, I suppose, a million pounds. It's a heavy responsibility. He bears it aloof, living alone, like the captain of a battleship. If the Japanese and we get to war, they'll be a nuisance with their raiders, he thinks. He remembers the time in the past war when his ship and another liner, the *Kaiser-i-Hind*, sailed to and fro in the Mediterranean with four Japanese destroyers as escort. " They never left us," he said. " They were very keen. To begin with, they knew no English. We used to chalk in big figures on a blackboard and hang it over the side when we were going to alter course." Of course, he had a different ship then.

This ship has been lucky so far—bombs near her, but no hits. We'd a close shave from scraping a trawler in the fog the second night out this voyage. "She was about so far off"—the Captain opened his hands 3 feet. However, she didn't touch us. A couple of destroyers passed our bows pretty close next morning.

He told how, one night last winter, during a gale of rain and sleet, they picked up a message from a 5,000-tonner 150 miles away—not far from Ireland—saying she was being attacked by a bomber. "Three minutes later she sent out another message—' O.K. yet.' Yes, O.K. yet—I thought that was good—I give him full marks for that. We never knew whether he got through or not. It was a foul night."

I asked a shipping official to-night what these captains get; would it be £1,500 a year? He said he thought not; if he got £1,000 he'd do well. The Cunard captains of 80,000-tonners get only about £1,300 or so; sometimes the chief engineer draws more than the captain, although the captain's authority is supreme; even the surgeon's report has to be countersigned by him.

The pay of ships' captains is too low compared with the salaries men earn selling insurance and motor cars. Still, he has a post of high dignity and commands great respect. That is much. Money is only a small part of what matters. A good many men in the armed forces are realising that. I talked yesterday with a pilot officer who was a stockbroker. I said, half jokingly, "I'd obliterate the Stock Exchange if I had my way." He said: "I think I would, too; or change it a lot. For the last ten or fifteen years it's been used far too much for speculation, and for that newspapers are largely responsible—pushing shares for their own advantage." But he added that shares are getting spread more evenly over the population—whereas twenty years ago you got five thumping orders from five big people now you get thirty orders from thirty people much smaller.

On the wall of the Captain's cabin hangs a Maori canoe paddle, carved on this ship during her last voyage East, when she carried 600 Maoris—fine men who marched round the decks with fixed bayonets as they continued their hard training. They presented this carved paddle to the ship's captain—the blade end signifies courage and skill, the middle portion steadfastness and sincerity, the top of the handle, alertness and watchfulness.

They gave him a translation of their epic of the paddle, *Te Hoe Hautu.* It reads:

Aotea is the canoe,
To Roku-o-Whitu is the Paddle.
Behold my paddle!
It is laid by the canoe's side,
Held close to the canoe's side.

Now 'tis raised high—the paddle !
Poised for the plunge—the paddle !
Now we spring forward !
Now it leaps and flashes—the paddl
It quivers like a bird's wing,
This paddle of mine.
See ! I raise it on high,
The handle of my paddle,
The Roku-o-Whitu.
I raise it—how it flies and flashes !
Ha ! The outward lift and the dashing,
The quick thrust and the backward sweep !
The swishing ! The swirling eddies !
The boiling white wake,
And the spray that flies from my Paddle !

It was in 1350 that the Maoris set forth on their hazardous voyage to New Zealand. Seven canoes were built and launched, one, the Arawa canoe, had a crew of 125 people, both men and women. This was a single canoe; some of the others are thought to have been lashed together, making a double canoe. Each had a captain, and a priest who acted as navigator. How much of the long voyage was achieved by paddle and how much by sail isn't known, but it is certain the paddles were of the utmost importance. The descendants of those adventurers sailed in this ship, and some of them have now given their lives in Greece and Crete. They have nobility in them. I remember Cumberworth, the New Zealand cartoonist, telling me how in one fight with the white settlers, when the whites had run out of food and water, the Maoris crept forward during the night and threw supplies into the stockade to enable the white folk to keep on fighting them (the Maoris). He had some good tales, too, of their sense of humour as poachers and of the Maori who raffled a dead racehorse.

We have eaten 15,000 eggs during this voyage. Over 1,600 men have their dinner in seventy-five minutes. They file into the kitchen, and each man takes his plates of meat and vegetables and pudding (which are waiting) and carries them into the mess decks. They have three good meals and, in addition, biscuits and cheese and cocoa about 7.30 p.m. Not since they joined the R.A.F. have they been so well fed.

Pukka Gen asked if I would do a few more trifles, so I sent them—

Airman, to the Wars advancing

Airman, to the wars advancing,
Brilliant sun and waves a-dancing,
Drinking, quoiting, yarning, sleeping,
Have a thought for those left weeping.

Stars on fire and Southern Cross,
Whale and shark and albatross,
A lovely ship on a sea that's kind,
But it's O, for those we left behind !

and

Vagabond

Give me a rail on which to lean
  And a glass to put to my eye,
A lively sea and a sky swept clean
  And a string of flags up high,
And you can have the solid earth
Of the land that gave me birth.

A heaving deck beneath my feet
  And a shudder in the hull,
And you can have the fields of wheat
  And the river running full.
For I have all the world to roam
And never a place called home.

O, I was never a marrying chap,
  Who settles to one girl,
Nor a steady chap nor a tarrying chap,
  But a chap whose life's a whirl.
For what I seek is beyond the skies
Or the love in a woman's eyes.

and

O, who would have peace again ?

O, who would have peace again
  When he could live like a fighting cock,
  And lie abed till eight o'clock ?
O, who would have peace again ?

O, who would have peace again
  When he could lie on deck i' the sun,
  And work be finished afore begun ?
O, who would have peace again ?

O, who would have peace again
  When he could leave the wife and kids,
  And spend his days a-polishing lids ?
O, who would have peace again ?

Why, I would have peace again,
So's I could plough the furrow clean
And be the lad I've always been.
Yea, I would have peace again.

Yea, I would have peace again,
To dandle our babby in my arms
And think no more of war's alarms.
Yea, I would have peace again.

Yea, I would have peace again,
To fish the river and tramp the wold
And drink my pint and grow to be old.
Yea, I would have peace again.

* * * *

The sea to-day is magnificent, a deep blue, whipped into a thousand white crests in which we roll a bit—just enough to tilt the deck and make games comical. Every now and then somebody shouts "A whale!" and we run to the rail to look. I never see anything myself, but claims of having seen black backs bursting through the waves or of spouts into the air are made. But I did see a seal to-day—a shiny black nose thrusting through the blue waves not far from our ship. To-day our convoy has been shaking itself up—some ships off to a port other than ours. They made a grand sight moving into position. It's colder now and promises to freshen up—both wind and water. We're not far from the Cape of Good Hope—it's thought we may see shore lights this evening.

Over tea I talked with a Civil Servant bound for Singapore. Curious how one meets people—his wife played Mrs. Meadows in my *Harvest in the North* at Unity Theatre. We talked of the supernatural. He said he'd had only one strange experience. At the time he lived in a Wimbledon flat—a converted large house. His daughter was four (she's about sixteen now). He and she were alone in the house; he was restless and went for a walk later on round Wimbledon Common. He'd looked in once or twice during the evening to see if the child was sleeping all right and did so again on his return towards midnight. He said that as he opened the bedroom door he had the sensation of feeling dwarfed by the room. His eyes went to his own large bed and he thought he saw on it a heap of rags. Then, when he walked closer, he saw it was his daughter, lying asleep, her eyes wet with crying. Her cot on the other side of the room—one of those cots with high sides—was empty. The sides (one could be let down) were still up, and there was no sign of his child having climbed up on to the big bed, as he thought there would have been had she done

so. He gently roused her and inquired if she were all right. She said she was. She said, explaining how she got there, that the lights beckoned her—apparently some lights outside the window (he didn't understand what she meant or what she had seen). She had tried to get out through the windows and being unable to, had cried. But he couldn't understand how she had climbed out of the cot—the side was too high for her short legs (he measured them). Nor could he believe she had, unassisted, got on to the bed. The event remains a mystery.

Another of his curious experiences was this: He was voyaging to California from China and met on board a missionary's wife, half Irish, half Welsh, who told fortunes from cards—two or three people, he said, were shaken by what she said, so accurate was it. She told him he would have a financial loss in New York. Six weeks later having forgotten about her, he was riding in a taxi through the Bowery when, in a mean street, he saw a well-dressed woman standing at a street corner staring vaguely about her as though lost. His impulse was to get out to see if he could assist her, but meanwhile the taxi was carrying him on. He did nothing. In another moment he realised it was the missionary's wife. He didn't go back, but, being thus reminded of her prophecy, proceeded at once to his hotel bedroom, where he had $150 in a small attaché case. It was perfectly safe. Mindful of what she had said, he pocketed the packet of dollars and, having a dinner and theatre appointment, left the hotel. That evening he was robbed in Broadway of the $150.

I mentioned this story to Cherub, who said he is quite sure ghosts exist and that he saw a cowled monk in the ruins or near the ruins of a monastery at Hunstanton. " That doesn't amount to much," he said, " and I don't claim it is irrefutable, although I'm satisfied about it myself, but a friend of mine, a farmer near Winchester, of whose sanity and common sense I haven't the slightest doubt and whose word is absolutely reliable, was walking one evening along a country road when he heard the cloppity-clop of galloping horses' hoofs and saw a coach and four coming along behind. He stood aside to let it pass, thinking it rather strange it should be there, and when it passed he got a most nauseating smell of decay, whereupon he felt the hairs on the back of his neck bristle with fear. He watched it go down the road and after some distance it left the road and proceeded across some fields and vanished into a wood or copse."

The R.C. padre believes in ghosts, too, or visitations from the spirit world. It seems to me that once you concede (or believe in) immortality, that both spiritualism and a belief in ghosts are rational enough. I'm by no means sure of any personal immortality and therefore unsure about ghosts, but that there are more things in heaven and earth, Horatius, etc., I fully grant. After all, the air in this quiet cabin is pulsing with voices and music, given the right instrument wherewith to listen to them.

Sir Hubert Wilkins the explorer told me one day, as we talked in his submarine *Nautilus*, that he could receive Morse signals from a certain German radio station straight into his head without any instrument at all. He added: " I happened to mention this to a woman in Boston, U.S.A. She said ' I have had a similar experience but have not dared to mention it to anybody, lest they should say I am mad.' " Moreover, each of us is a broadcasting station transmitting the waves of our personality and thoughts. I imagine that where men have thought nobly and lived good lives and folk have been happy, there an aroma of serenity abides.

* * * *

At three o'clock this morning we were shipping water over the bridge, rain was driving and altogether it was a dirty night. So the Chief Engineer tells me. I knew next to nothing of it. We creaked and rolled and I dreamed about being in trenches, but otherwise I slept through it. My hair brush ran into a remote corner. In the men's quarters I'm told lemonade bottles danced about the floor. The water remains rough (at noon) and the wind fresh. The ship's musician said just now: "They call it the ' Cape doctor '—supposed to blow all your microbes away." Many of us would have felt ill had we had this rolling when the voyage began, but now, except for an odd one, we take it all right. I ate my customary breakfast. I've been judging the short-story contest—a poor lot, but one will do called *Six o'clock News*—a tale of a poor old man who began to hear on his radio news of events before they occurred. He was soon rich; then, trying to save a man whose death he had heard of in advance, was himself run over.

The news bulletin to-day quotes a Berlin writer as saying that nobody should expect a *Blitzkrieg* in Russia and that methods which succeeded in the West cannot do so in the East. (The Germans used to say Hindenburg was like the sun: rose in the East and set in the West. Is Hitler to be the reverse ?) The Scots Church padre thinks war cannot last another year. The Chief Engineer said the other day that the war is a test of endurance between our civilians and the German civilians and that ours will win it for us. At all events, one can see more light in the darkness than at any period since France fell. If Russia can keep on fighting and we can continue hammering German cities, Hitler will crash. The bombing of Berlin in only seven hours of darkness is a portent.

Given a good library, I could live on this ship, in this monastic atmosphere, till the war is over. But most folk, younger than I, are weary of it.

The day continues stormy. We could imagine ourselves in the North Sea on a wild October day. Rain streams down. The Australian R.N.V.R. Lieutenant says: " The rain'll flatten it out "—meaning the rough sea. " By this time to-morrow we may be too hot again—changes very fast round here."

* * * *

In his *Short History of English Literature*, Mr. B. Ifor Evans points out that Henry Fielding made his characters who were rogues perform generous acts.

When talking to a high police official in Britain not long ago, he told me of his experiences in dealing with prostitutes and men who lived on their earnings. He said that most of the prostitutes were pretty decent, generous-hearted women, very loyal at helping one another. A few of them had done well financially and owned property. (At least one artist who came to London and had to draw pavement sketches to earn a few coppers has told how he was kept going by prostitutes.) The police official said he used to deal drastically with men who lived on women's immoral earnings—he would warn them to stop it, but if they didn't desist, he would lie in wait round a street corner, grab the man by his necktie when he appeared and thrash him with his fists. He said they never squealed.

(To-day the ship rolls more than ever. Waves rush away from the vessel's side and burst into spray blown by the stiff wind. From time to time that spray becomes illumined, as though a rainbow ran through it.) The stern of the ship ahead rises and falls 10 to 15 feet, and seas break over the fore and aft decks of one of our escorting warships. Yesterday our ship's Captain fell asleep in his clothes at 6.30 a.m. and slept till 9.30 a.m.—that was all the rest he had.

Pukka Gen has been investigating (in the Northcliffe manner) what stores we have consumed. Cigarettes smoked amount to twenty-one per man per day. Over 70,000 bottles of lemonade have been drunk; officers and senior N.C.Os. have drunk 4,800 glasses of spirits and 7,200 pints of beer. The lads have written 9,000 letters, of which about $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. required minor deletions. Crime abroad has been almost nil—only three men have been punished for misdemeanours.

The war in Russia begins to make men optimistic. Two officers yesterday thought the war will be finished in a year. A shipping official spoke of the need to punish Germany severely: " I've dealt with 'em for twenty years. They are all the same; bullies when they can be. No use saying it's Hitler—they're one bunch." I've been thinking that, inasmuch as the cure for Germany is to dilute her people and scatter them over the earth, it may be well to prevent her soldiers returning to Germany when we've won the war—they might become hewers of wood and drawers of water in the countries they've despoiled or occupied, kept in foreign lands for good.

The Civil Servant who has lived for some years in China described to us something of the typhoon in Hong Kong about 1938. He said

that about a score of liners were wrecked and one gunboat was flung out of the harbour into the street. " The rain was so dense as to be just like fog—no visibility at all. The wind reached a velocity of 164 miles an hour—I *crawled* back to the house where I was staying. Usually you have about half an hour's warning from the meteorological people. At the air station everything was shoved into the hangar, including the C.O's. horses. About 30,000 people were drowned or killed, the natives suffering terribly. Yet the Chinese are always cheerful and quite calm—they'd come round begging afterwards and we'd give 'em all the rice we had. They never get hysterical, as Europeans would. But at the same time the Chinese can be cruel—you see a boy sitting in the gutter with a string tied to a bird's leg, letting it fly off and then pulling it back again. They seem to love torturing animals." He went on to tell of the Chinese doctors. A British sergeant had a Chinese mistress who lived with him and fell ill, suffering with a bad cough. She didn't improve and finally said she would die unless she had a Chinese doctor. My informant drove the sergeant down to the doctor and watched him go through his performance. The doctor (sitting with an assistant) inquired if the sergeant were willing to pay the higher price for blood from the tongue rather than from the shoulder. On the sergeant saying " Yes," the doctor proceeded to slit his own tongue with a knife and squeeze blood from it into a bowl. The assistant mixed the blood with some other substance and meanwhile the doctor swallowed his tongue (or appeared to) to stop the bleeding. Using the blood, etc., as ink, the doctor then wrote a prescription which roughly was that the girl must eat condensed milk and bread with sardines. The sergeant bought these foods and the girl ate them and within twenty-four hours was cured. Whether it was a case of faith healing, one doesn't know. He proceeded: " The Chinese have all sorts of funny ways of curing things. If you dine with them and after a rich meal begin hiccupping, they'll take the middle finger of each hand and squeeze it till it hurts. I've had it done to me—it stops the hiccupping. Similarly, if you've a headache, they'll press some nerve or muscle at the back of your neck or head; it cures it temporarily, at any rate. If you're bitten by a snake in the countryside and the nearby snake-man comes (you may die in six hours if not cured), he'll plunge his hand into the snake's hole, which he's adept at finding, open its mouth, squeeze from its tongue some further poison, mix that poison with a pulp caused by his chewing leaves from the nearby bushes, open the wound and rub the ointment into the wound. There's no doubt they effect cures by that method."

* * * *

A calm sea and a beautifully warm morning when we arrived in port in South Africa. Twenty miles out I saw, for the first time, whales blowing—a rising puff of water that resembles steam, going 6 feet high—

rather as though a small shell has dropped there. (How significant this is, to liken a blowing whale to a shell !) We lay against the quay for an hour or two before I came ashore. Niggers scrambled about for the usual pennies. One had the raggedest overcoat I ever saw, as much hole as cloth. Trousers of another were mixed khaki and blue. Overcoats and bare feet were fashionable. A policeman came up in a white topee and pushed them further back, paddling their backsides with his truncheon, as though they were boys. Meanwhile, our lads played off a heat in the tug of war on deck. A South African ambulance girl produced oranges and began shying them to the lads; next, a darkie newspaper-seller appeared and, rolling his paper up and tying it with a strand of rope which he unravelled, he tossed them accurately to his purchasers 20 or 30 feet up. I heard an aircraftman shouting: " Come on. Let's 'ave a look at you, love "—this to a girl ashore.

Small kindnesses greet us. I went to a teashop on the quay to ask if they could get me a taxi. The girl telephoned, but would not take the call money. I was supposed to have a certificate from the purser to take £6 in British money out of the docks, but the Customs men allowed me to write my own certificate. They didn't examine my baggage: called out, " Let this car pass." My taxi-driver was a fat girl about seventeen—looked like the guv'nor's daughter. But the fare was dear—5*s*. The car was a Chevrolet saloon, about 20 h.p., like a private car. My second taxi-driver was a powdered and painted woman of turned forty—again, looked like the guv'nor's wife. She had black kid gloves and a wrist-watch, said most drivers are women since the war. As we drove along we passed a few rickshaws drawn by extremely hefty niggers wearing an array of feathers and gewgaws like braves in war paint. I said: " They must be terribly hot." My driver said: " The hotter it is, the better they like it." None had a passenger. She said they charge about 6*d*. a mile—the Australians are fond of using them and " foreigners " like to sit in them and have their pictures taken.

This port is said to be 150 per cent. pro-British. When I handed my fare on a bus the conductor said: " All transport's free to you in this town." But there are odd spots of intransigence that goes back to the Boer War. A bank manager who handled my letter of credit to whom I said I supposed a large majority of South Africa is behind the war replied: " I wouldn't say it's large. There are small towns in the Free State and Transvaal that are against the British—Dutch people who are not pro-German, but are anti-British." He told of a scrap some twelve months ago between the occupants of a South African artillery camp and local students who'd been showing their dislike of khaki. He went on: " Two months ago in this town, when my wife and I came out of a cinema—she was in defence uniform—she was spat on," and he advised me to walk warily in Pretoria after dark—Dutch hooligans might prove unpleasant. " I wouldn't walk alone at night," he advised. (This may

be exaggeration—I don't know. He seemed shrewd and sound enough.) He asked how England was after the bombing. "What we'd like to hear," he said, "is that they're getting it back in Germany." My waitress at lunch was an Edinburgh girl whose husband is a sapper in the S.A. forces up in Egypt. He sends her 7*s.* a day of his 10*s.* a day and this, with 4*s.* 6*d.* a day wife allowance, makes her comfortably-off. "I do this job to keep me occupied," she said. "How's the war? Oh, we don't know there's one on here. Last night we had a black-out—a try-out. We've had one or two. Half the lights were on and the buses were all lit up and ran about. We have a siren, but you'd have to be just behind it to hear it. The only food we're short of is white bread and because they're short of it (there's plenty of brown) they think they're being murdered."

To-night the town is studded with thousands of lights which appear to tremble, almost dance. Pylons are lighted in colours, electric wheels turn on the pleasure beach—the scene is like an English resort in peace-time. Most of the servants at my hotel are blacks or Indians, wearing white ducks, white shoes, bringing something of the atmosphere of the East or the Far West. I asked for morning tea at 8 a.m. The Indian head waiter said: "Seven-thirty is the latest time." He stretched a point and made it 7.45. The hotel is filled with middle-aged business men and plump wives; many are Jews, others perhaps Dutch. To-night as I crossed the road I exchanged a word or two with a South African air-gunner sergeant in drill—ruddy, well set up, twenty-five or so, He's not long back from twelve or fourteen months in Abyssinia, as navigator in aircraft. I said: "Have you been lucky?" He said: "Too lucky, really. I'm the only one left in my squadron—the only machine, anyhow." I said: "You can't be too lucky." He said: "You're telling me." I asked if the Italians fought well when they were up against it. He said: "They didn't seem to have their hearts in it, really, but individuals fought very well indeed. I'll take off my hat to some of 'em. They knew their stuff. Just a few of their machines—the Fiats—were beauties. Once or twice they beat even the Hurricanes in manœuvrability. But that was rare."

I spoke to General Smuts's private secretary at Pretoria by telephone—the line was first-rate. He'll see what can be done about my seeing the Prime Minister. I'm booked to fly to Cairo, but if Smuts can see me, I'll put off flying for a few days.

* * * *

I took lunch in a large draper's store at Durban, but was not allowed to pay for it; the staff contribute 5*s.* a month to provide meals for all men in uniform. I tried to persuade the waitress to give me a bill—said I could well afford to pay. She smiled, but wouldn't do it.

When I booked my ticket for Pretoria, I inquired if any concession is

made to soldiers and was directed to an office upstairs. Here an old Scot became most enthusiastic at the prospect of saving me a few pounds —looked up books, telephoned Johannesburg, told me where to get a certificate and finally saved me some £3. He was more delighted than I was. He spoke of some intransigent spirits up Pretoria way (confirmed the occasional hostility to khaki) adding: "They're Smuts's own people, and I suppose he can't go too far with them." An occasional speech or letter in the local paper complains of too much complacency, or of profiteering, or of the Town Hall Committee-rooms not being blacked out. But for her size—South Africa has 2,000,000 whites only and about 8,000,000 coloured folk—I'm assured South Africa's war effort is very great.

The *Natal Mercury* has an admirable leading article on post-war problems, saying the gnawing sense of social insecurity which most folk suffer from can only be removed by a drastic reorganisation of the Dominion's social system, adding that it will entail the nationalisation of all essential services, such as hospitals and medicine, and a fund for old age pensions, widows' pensions, etc. This better social order can alone repay the sacrifices of war.

* * * *

I am writing in my coupé on the train going to Pretoria—a small compartment for one, wherein I shall sleep; green leather, old-fashioned wash-basin. The gauge is about a foot narrower than ours and we rock a lot. The line is electrified a good deal of the way—the journey is about 600 miles. I've just had the best train lunch for half a crown I've ever encountered—soup, fish, steak and onions, salads, cheese, fresh fruit, coffee. All Europeans dine together, first- and second-class, officers and other ranks—a good democratic note. This is winter, but it's a broiling afternoon and I'm working in shirt sleeves. The countryside is burnt brown; we're running through rounded hills and rough brush—a few kraals.

Last night I took supper with a Cornishman, manager of a cable company. Belief in the occult is wider-spread than I thought. His father was for forty years at sea, finally a captain. This sea-captain said to his son (my host): "If you ever get a premonition, act on it." The sea-captain in the days when he was mate, was asked to go as first officer to his brother, who captained a sailing ship. He arranged to go, took all his traps down to London docks, got halfway up the gangway and stopped.

"I'm not coming, George," he shouted.

"What do you mean, not coming?" George shouted back.

But he didn't go. They had to get another first officer. The ship sailed —and it was never heard of again.

My host's wife lives in Plymouth. Their boy was killed flying two years ago. His wife wrote recently saying their boy, although dead two years, has saved her life. His voice came to her just before one of Plymouth's *Blitzes* started, saying: " Go down to the shelter, Mother." She followed his advice and, while in the shelter, the spot she had been occupying upstairs was demolished. (In the last war my friend, Cedric Whittaker, who hated dugouts—whereas I liked them—dreamed our surface dugout had collapsed, dreamed so vivid that he persuaded us to shift out gear out of it. Later that day the dugout collapsed.)

My host's mother is ninety—lives at Penzance. She was in bed when the first air-raid alarm sounded. " Come along, Mother. You'll have to come down in your dressing-gown," her daughter said. " Indeed, I won't," said the old lady. " I never *have* gone downstairs in dressing gowns," and she proceeded to do her hair and put on a lace collar. (One would like to know if old German ladies behave like this.)

The courage of some human beings is far beyond anything I could aspire to. Consider men who journey alone round the world in small sailing boats. One fetched up at Durban—it was a small 4-ton craft. He had sailed about 30-odd thousand miles in her—once he heard no voice for fourteen days. He was asked what he did with his time. " Time ? " he said. " There isn't half enough time. I've got to be continually scraping and repainting the ship, all her rigging has to be looked to, sails mended, meals cooked, sleep to be got. No time at all." Sleep ? Oh, he fixed the sails and tied the tiller and got three or four hours, came up to look at the weather and went down below again. He conceded that in bad weather it sometimes took him ten minutes to travel 10 feet across the cabin to the galley. He was a middle-aged, retired man, too.

A Natal phrase for bumping a man off is: " He'd do with a dose of lead poisoning."

Our R.A.F. lads, with the exception of officers and senior N.C.Os., didn't get ashore the first day. Lads on the other ships did. This failure to standardise is bad for discipline.

I observe that Mr. H. G. Lawrence, Minister for the Interior, said yesterday that in the first quarter of this year fifty-one British seamen deserted their ships in this harbour and in the second quarter 103 British seamen did likewise. He was explaining why certain seamen are detained in goal. We need these correctives to the absurd notion (which helps to encourage wars) that all seamen and soldiers become heroes during war. A good many do nothing of the sort. I was told recently of a warrant officer who takes a rake-off from the troops' barbers for winking at the petty breaking of regulations.

A sprinking of N.C.Os. are loud-voiced " four flushers " who have bounced themselves into their jobs. We saw them in evidence the other night on our ship, when the sergeants were invited to a games party in the first-class lounge. As the night wore on a few of them sallied forth on to the platform and monopolised the microphone, inflicting on us tipsy songs and boring monologues. Officers don't seem to control them half well enough.

Riding in this train is akin to riding a horse—we are positively bouncing along. The view at the moment is superb—the far hillsides are partly covered with firs and other woods, interspersed by shining rounded shoulders of brown hill—a cross between Wales and Cumberland.

* * * *

I tried half a dozen hotels in Pretoria yesterday before I got in at a private hotel kept by a Scotswoman; very comfortable and cheap—12*s.* 6*d.* a day. But taxis are the devil; a run round the block is 5*s.* The town is mixed—half of it reminds you of a town in the Middle West, not long built. It was plain from the journey across Natal and the Transvaal that a lot of the natives are living under wretched conditions—rotten little shacks with corrugated tin roofs or tarpaulins held down by a heap of stones. The landscape is mostly dried, yellow, parched grass or red soil, though there's brown soil and fields black by burning. One caught sight of blacks trudging home after work, carrying their tools, and perhaps an old blanket wrapped round their shoulders. Two Bantus I noticed were solemnly practising dance steps in the soil. At 6 p.m. we we were at Estcourt—a very clean-looking, up-to-date station with a sign: " Light meals, 1*s.* 6*d.*" The main-street buildings seemed to be of wood, and the place brightly lit like a fair-ground. As darkness dropped, the sky was pale blue; on the left, a rim of yellow ran along the skyline.

The compartment was decidedly cold during the night. At 5 a.m. I was roused with tepid coffee; at six, changed trains or, rather, waited half an hour at Germiston. Thence when riding towards Pretoria, we saw the hideousness of industry's hand on Johannesburg—slag heaps of what resembles yellow or grey chalk mud. The buildings nearby are mostly of corrugated iron, appearances mostly ramshackle, as though their existence were temporary and the owners were desperately poor. The natives knocking about don't look rich either, yet I take it this landscape has yielded a crop of millionaires.

After breakfast I called on the Under-Secretary for Telegraphs (or his deputy). It has taken me two or three days to get authority to send a Press telegram. Now it's done and everybody is very obliging. Links with Britain crop up. The Censor at Durban is a Manchester man, out in South African forty years. At Pretoria I find a man whose forbears were

Lancashire, too. Thence to see General Smuts's private secretary, whose talk in Afrikaans on the telephone has kinship with Dutch and German. The Union Building of sandstone perched on a hill looks to me magnificent—colonades, flights of steps, courtyards, pools and rectangles of water, but I'm assured it's rather a white elephant and not very convenient for housing its staff. I have travelled 600 miles partly to see Pretoria and Johannesburg, but mainly in the hope that I may talk with General Smuts, but knowing that this is uncertain. However, within ten minutes of my arrival I was shown in to him. He wanted to know which was my paper. He was friendly, asked from time to time, " Do you understand ? " (a trick of speech), and occasionally began his remarks with: " My dear Hodson——"

General Smuts goes to bed between ten and eleven, he told me, wakes about six and starts work on his papers about seven. He looks very well. He talks readily and with immense lucidity. Like G. B. S. and L.-G., he doesn't appear to want anything more than an occasional word from you to keep him going. He walked to the door and he wished me good luck in the Middle East. I said I understand that about half South Africa's men up north speak only Afrikaans. He said that was so, adding they were all good boys. I said they have proved that already. I was much heartened by this talk, and by seeing how able some of our leaders in the Commonwealth are. He struck me as very confident of himself. He's said to be a man of instant decision, and not without arrogance. That's as it may be.

At my table in Pretoria were a young lieutenant of Engineers and his fiancée, a corporal. He's been up in East Africa as a sergeant. He said the Italians he saw mostly ran—they were poor specimens. Those in prison camps near here won't be fit to work on roads for another six months, so low is their physique (so he says). For years they've been underfed. The Lieutenant said: " Your chaps are little fellas, too, aren't they ? All those we've seen are." I said they vary—that our Guards are 6-footers or more. We talked about food in England. He says he eats about six eggs a day. In East Africa he bought 250 bananas for 6*d*. They were sorry I haven't time to go to the Game Reserve, where, they said, lions and zebras and giraffes trot alongside the road. The Lieutenant said: " If you're lucky, you may see a lion make its kill." You can drive for several hundred miles through the Reserve. Unless the occupants of a car fool about and try touching the animals or some such nonsense the lions, etc., leave them alone. Speaking of South Africa's coloured people, he said the Hindus make good waiters, but not much else. The finest specimens are the Zulus in Natal—these are the giants who draw the rickshaws in Durban—" But," he said, " they only last at that job about three years—get worn out. They save every penny they can." His fiancée's uncle took a body of those Zulus to Britain (they were soldiers) in the last war.

The uncle said that when they arrived, the girls made a beeline for the Zulus, and that the white men hadn't a look in.

This is a land of threepenny bits. Each telephone call requires one. A taximan yesterday called them " tickies." I'm impressed by the cheerful looks of most of the black folk; a lot of them appear to find life far more funny and worth while than the whites do. In Johannesburg this afternoon I took a half-crown ride on a municipal bus. We roamed round the outskirts, past the golf links, burnt and parched brown, and alongside innumerable villas, some of them rather fine. But we fetched up at " Northcliffe," on a lofty height where, in a tea-room, a somewhat strident soprano was singing to a microphone. This microphone craze is a menace—casts a spell on folk, makes them feel they're miniature B.B.Cs. This young woman got only the most perfunctory applause, but she went on and on, song after song. Then a Jewish gentleman came and called for three cheers for those who had been entertaining " the boys." Next, he came to the microphone and said he had lost his hat—a good hat. Had anybody found it ? After that a jazz band started (lusty young men who might be better occupied in Tobruk) and a fellow crooned about—

Minnie of Trinidad,
Was'n good and she was'n bad,
All the natives would be so sad
If she ever left Trinidad.

There was a bathing pool, but it wasn't working; the sun was superb, the scenery grand, and here were the white folk enjoying themselves as though bricks and mortar hemmed them in. Pathetic. On top of the highest rock a small group of youths had a melodeon and sang, " There'll always be an England," which is inclined to make cold water run down my back. Johannesburg is sprinkled with V's for victory. Women wear them in their coats. Men stick them on cars and garages. The cynic might say: " Forward the V's, stick at home and be comfortable and shove a V on your car window—sign of the patriot." The local *Sunday Times* pointed out yesterday that South Africa's war taxes are the lowest in the world (a business-man put them to me at one-twelfth of ours in Britain). Oh well ! South Africa, like Britain, is a mixed place. With only 2,000,000 whites, it has already sent its second division to the war (one ex-soldier says they sent only one brigade and some odds and ends last time) but scores of thousands don't know there's a war on, as the saying has it. Food is magnificent. Profiteering, complacency—these are plentiful. In Johannesburg one gets an impression of a good many hard-faced men driving about in luxurious cars, accompanied by fattish women; of skyscrapers; of good bookshops; of cheap food; of streets as modern as America's—and, on the outskirts, of iron and tin shacks and dust and the awful slag heaps with dust rising from them like smoke.

As we drove round the town, I jotted down a few notes: a sign "*Tremhalte*" (all signs are in English and Afrikaans); a clergyman announced to speak on "The Tyranny of Time"; a dark-brown, scrubby, rocky hillside covered with villas; a shop selling "Groceries, coal, fish and Dandy floor polish"; a private hotel—"rooms daily and weekly"; the Emmanuel Gospel Hall, "all welcome"; the seats in streets for non-Europeans; a white house with black marble steps; dusty trees with tendrils hanging down (where leaves should be) as though thick strands of dust were being rained down; a sign "Orders for sand" and another "Swiss pies and suckers." Posters on walls, appealing to men to join the Army, show figures of three men, one an old Boer of 1838 with a rifle, a second of him wearing a bandolier in 1899, and a third of the modern lad of 1941 with gas mask slung at the alert. Facing the railway station at Pretoria is a tall statue of Paul Kruger, a knobbly-faced, thick-set old gentleman in square hat and frock coat, with a broad sash across his chest and orders on his coat. Below him are carved burly, whiskered Boers crouched, each with his rifle—powerful, tough, Puritanical-looking men, who strike you as being akin to Cromwell, well able to shoot out your bowels in the name of the Lord.

The papers to-day print a broadcast by Wing-Commander A. G. Malan, who has twice won the D.S.O. and twice the D.F.C. He's a South African who has shot down thirty-five enemy craft. He quotes a pilot as saying: "They're Huns. Come and cut yourself a slice of cake." He has a small son and looks forward to settling down when the war's over. The same papers have a note on a soldier up in Egypt writing to say that in some of the bombs that don't explode they find notes: "Good luck, England" or "This is the best we can do." Those bombs hold sawdust. (One wonders how far this is true? The same tale was rife in England at one time.)

It was suggested to me in Durban that to wear khaki uniform in Pretoria or Johannesburg alone at night might lead to unpleasantness. It is true that incidents occurred a few months ago, but, in fact, the streets hold a good many uniforms, both South African and British, for we've lads here training to be pilots. I wouldn't call folk in these parts markedly courteous; they're inclined to be gruff, but I've seen no sign, personally, of antipathy. One sees an occasional villa flying the Union Jack.

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The hefty young chauffeur who drove me out to a tennis party to-day said he was 100 per cent. for the war, but he belonged to the Apostolic Group and didn't believe in fighting. "There are so many other ways one can help, aren't there?" he said. He talked about the diamond

mines at Kimberley, said that very rarely does a lucky miner stick to his gains—only rarely does it do him any good. But digging for diamonds so gets hold of men that they can't give it up. He himself wouldn't dream of going in for it. He had done a day or two 5,000 feet down a gold mine, but it was too hot and the atmosphere was thick. Miners got phthisis, too.

Another informant—this time at the tennis party—said they rarely get phthisis now. He agreed it is certainly hot down in the mines—maybe 100 degrees. Every 200 feet lower you go the temperature rises by 1 degree. They are down in some mines to about 10,000 feet. Gold may exist as low as 25,000 feet, but that's a trifle doubtful, he said, and, anyhow, there are limits in depth to which men can go. Already in the deep mines they have to keep refrigeration plants working there to make it bearable. In ten years' time, he said, it's thought the east basin may be worked out. He spoke of the theory that Johannesburg is the site of an ancient river mouth, a kind of Amazonian delta to which a mighty river brought deposits of soil which housed gold.

I asked him how many people live in Jo'burg. He said that on the Rand there are about half a million; about 300,000 blacks work in the mines, earning about 2*s*. 2*d*. a shift, and "all found" for them, in addition, in the compound where they live. They live in the compound for about six months, then go back to do farmwork for a similar period, and then return once more to the mines. The whites working below in the mines earn from £1 a shift to about £100 a month (he said). This mighty population has been built up on digging for gold. "Yet," I said to him, half-seriously, "of what use is the gold? We deposit ingots in the banks of England, America and so forth, but never see it or use it. If we wrote on a sheet of paper 'This represents 500 ingots'—or whatever it may be—we should be just as well off. We might drop all the gold in the middle of the Atlantic and carry on just the same, especially if we dropped it secretly."

He grinned wryly and said: "Well, I suppose we have to have tokens of some sort, else we go back to barter." I suspect his wife didn't like this talk and thought me revolutionary. He said: "Well, some of us are worried what will happen to Jo'burg if, after this war, the world takes a more realistic view of things."

With another well-informed observer I discussed (or he did) South Africa's problems. It has several—the native problem, the problem of Indians living here, the English and Afrikaans problem (the reader or speaker of only Afrikaans has no cinemas talking Afrikaans, and not many books written in that language). In Cape Town and Province there's the problem of the semi-coloured descendants of the original Dutch settlers who married Hottentots (I think he said there are some 200,000 of them). And, in addition, there's the Jewish problem. One reason, he said, for sympathies with German Nazis arises from the large

number of Jews, some of whom have a genius for making their presence unpalatable. "There's a fair amount of selfish motor-car driving in Jo'burg, and more often than not it is that of Jews in 20- or 30-h.p. American cars." The Jews appear to have no more restraint than a Wurlitzer organ. But perhaps we expect too much. In the same way, perhaps, we expect too much of the Japanese? A captain in our Intelligence Service (newly appointed) who is going East and who has lived many years in Japan, said that Englishmen go to Japan and expect their business-men to be 100 per cent. honest and pure. Do they get that standard from other Englishmen? Not at all. Then why blame the Japanese for being no worse than we are. This captain said he understood what they are up to, and though, of course, as an Englishman he dislikes it and condemns it, if he were Japanese he would think differently and probably approve. The Japanese, he said, are difficult to get to know; they are very suspicious (as, he said, we are), but once you really know them, you like them. He prefers them to the Chinese.

The tennis at this party was first-rate—better than the English standard at a similar affair. But in Jo'burg they can play all the year. To-day is winter, but it was, from 11 a.m. to about 5 p.m., decidedly hot and the sky cloudless. Day after day is the same.

There are 30,000 to 50,000 Italian prisoners in the Union—men of a low type, I am told. Others, the bulk of them, have been shipped to India. Of those here no use is, so far, being made. It would cost more to employ them on roads than to use native labour. But I don't see how they can be kept idle indefinitely.

I'm told there's a shortage of vegetables in the Union, owing to convoys calling and the sending of supplies to the Middle East. But I don't notice it. Food abounds and is cheap, apart from drinks, which are dear. In the restaurant of my Jo'burg hotel (inevitably the word "Jewburg" is used occasionally) you can dine for 3*s*. or 4*s*. In Britain it would cost 50 to 100 per cent. more.

An official in the Government Information Bureau tells me that, when one important battle in the African campaign was fought, his photographers were kept 500 miles away. He went up to find out why and discovered that a British officer whose distinction was that he was the oldest man of his rank in the British Army was in charge of public relations. They had an up-and-down verbal tussle over the matter. I said we were pretty good at that sort of obstruction—at the Battle of Loos in the last war the war correspondents were actually confined to their quarters.

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Returning to Durban, I sat at breakfast with a young man from Ilford, London, returning after four and a half months in the Congo,

during which he hadn't seen a white man. He'd been cutting spaces for petrol dumps and emergency landing grounds. He said it took him two months to get accustomed to the loneliness—after that it wasn't so bad. "There came a time when the black boys had developed their system of doing the job and didn't need any further orders from me—no need to speak to them any more. That made it worse. I had some malaria and some dysentery. I took bottlefuls of chlorodyne for the dysentery—did no good. The boys brewed stuff from leaves—very bitter; that put me right." I asked if he read much. He said, "I soon got through my reading matter. After that I used to lie on my back with a pair of field glasses watching the antics of birds—you'd be surprised what they do."

I am writing at Mozambique. We've flown from Durban, having stopped for a few minutes at Lorenço Marques and at Beira. Durban was lit up as we drove to the harbour—one or two buildings looked like cotton mills blazing with lights. The water was black and grey. We were supposed to be limited to 40 lb. of luggage—I had possibly 70 lb., having discarded my valise and sleeping bag and two suits (to come on by sea). But some of my companions have enormous portmanteaux that would make six of my valise. I've been kicking myself for accepting the War Office and Airways dictum. Just before we took off, the waves alongside were 4 or 5 feet high in furious water and spray caused by our rush over the sea, but that lasts only a few moments—then you're off the water. The horizon was a dusky blue, merging higher up into smoky pink. After about an hour we were served with breakfast—grape-fruit, bacon and kidney on a skewer, with mushrooms and potatoes, rolls, marmalade, coffee (not hot enough). But most of us made an indifferent meal. Half of us were sleepy, the plane was very cold, and the journey bumpy enough to make you wonder whether, if that went on, you'd be sick. The country we flew over was bare and brown. After breakfast I shoved feet into the muff, put on greatcoat and muffler and settled down to sleep—the roar of engines became steady and friendly, we climbed to 10,000 feet and the aircraft moved solid as a train. I slept for two hours. Clouds flew past below us.

To-day's *Natal Mercury* has a leading article on "The Hospital Muddle"—talks of the malnutrition, the actual starvation widespread among the Bantus. The neglect of native medical and hospital services threatens the health of the whole community (it says). About 20 per cent. of non-Europeans in Durban (this handsome town) have venereal disease, and the deaths from tuberculosis in Durban last year numbered 727. They plead for rural hospitals—usually there's not more, in the countryside, than one doctor to 40,000 people. I've been reading, also, Professor W. M. MacMillan's *Democratise the Empire* wherein, at the close, he advocates M.Ps. for some of our Colonies sitting in the House of

Commons. He throws light on why health is poor among natives—vast areas in Africa have, and can have, no cattle and no milk, and little means of fertilising the fields. It seems clear from his book that the 8,000,000 blacks in the South African Union are politically powerless.

A South African soldier has written home: " Dear Mother,—They say there are 200 miles of desert. About 100 miles of it blew past us to-day and we expect the other 100 miles to-morrow."

My hostess at Jo'burg described to me how she sometimes sits on the lawn spearing moles—she hates doing it, but finds it the only way to deal with them, once they get too bad. " I take a book and sit and wait. It nearly makes me sick, feeling that spear go through its body. Then the boy deals with it. Ugh ! Once I poisoned a snake with nicotine—taken from the head boy's foul pipe. It killed the snake within a minute or so."

To return to this air voyage. One traveller is a Colonel of the Ghurkas, bound for India. He's a gallant spirit—at the age of forty-four he's been learning how to jump from aircraft as a parachutist: broke his ankle—4 inches of bone stuck out. I gather the wind was too strong: three men were injured before he was—a cracked skull, and so forth. But he didn't know that when he jumped. A young man who is getting off at Mombasa said: " When you were in Pretoria, did you hear of the officer who'd been in Crete who lectured there? Said that before the Crete show started, they all felt very strange—there was a tension in the air. The birds wouldn't fly."

Brigadier Freyburg (said the lecturer) called his Staff officers and said he himself felt something queer was afoot. They replied: " We all feel the same, sir." Not long after that the Germans had fleets of aircraft in the air coming to Crete. That was what they had felt, the vibration in the air. (I heard later in Cairo a cynical description of the fighting in Crete: " General Freyburg is a very good swimmer and a very brave man.")

The earth during the first part of the flight was as a desert of brown scrub—no vestige of life. A broad river was almost dry, its bed sand as bright as Brighton's. Thin trickles of water which catch the sun are turned to streaks of silver or of gold.

One can't see the propeller going round, but it makes a dirty blur in the atmosphere.

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We saw a great many fires to-day scattered over the earth where grass or scrub was burning—at intervals for some thirty or forty miles. The horizon was full of smoke. The absence of life is remarkable—up to

midday I saw three small yachts on a broad river—nothing else. We flew over a region of swamps—miles of water laden with woods. At one time thin grey clouds scudded past below us, extremely tenuous clouds moving fast, yet inextricably keeping their formation like aircraft, even the most fragmentary of them.

To-day we were called at 3.45 a.m. The moon was superb, large and silver in a black sky lit with stars. Somebody said there were a lot of lions not far off. (A joke, no doubt.) I had some talk with the Ghurkas' Colonel. He came out on another ship in my convoy. They were not allowed to hear the B.B.C. on their loud-speakers—some notion it might give away their position. But we, quite close to them, heard the B.B.C. twice a day—another example of the need for a sensible ruling. Theirs was a coal-burning ship. The stokers had a busy time and were understaffed. The Colonel told them he was sure that he could get help from military officers and men, who were eating their heads off with nothing to do. But he was told that wouldn't be in order—if that happened the ship would be boycotted when it got back to a British port. He is a man of ideas—doesn't think the working-man has a square deal, although in some ways he regards him as pampered. He thinks we should offer India full Dominion status at once, though there are some consequent developments which would have to wait till the war's over. The Ghurkas, it seems, are not, in a sense, Indians at all—their homes are probably two months' journey from where they are stationed. He regards them as quite unspoilt, unsophisticated. They have their own religion, with feasts (one lasts some ten days), which may include slaughter of cattle. They have their own priest, who claims that his prayers are effective. He told me an amusing tale of another colonel of Ghurkas who had no son—that good fortune had eluded him. One day his men were going off to visit a temple. They persuaded him to send 10 rupees to the priest —they were sure the priest's prayers would result in a son. Jokingly, he gave them the 10 rupees—but the odd thing was that within a year his wife gave him a son. The son served in the regiment and was always known as " Davie sahib." The men had no doubt their priest's prayers did the trick. My companion has never seen the Indian rope trick and has met only one man who believes he has. "But," the Colonel said, " you can see, almost any day, men throwing themselves into a trance and being buried alive, and, later, dug up again. Some remain buried for as long as seventy-two hours. They're very firm on their being dug up at the time they stipulate, not left any longer."

This is a flying-boat and I have wondered if she could get down safely on land. The pilot thinks he probably could " get away with it " if the earth were sand. Once, he said, he had to get down in $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet of water—the boat really needs at least 4 feet of water—and did so without damage, and got off again, too.

Our remoteness from the earth gives you a curious feeling of being removed from mundane worries and thought. I believe one reason why our pilots are as tranquil and serene as they are among their immense dangers is that the element in which they fight is abnormal and affords them a god-like feeling—for a period, at all events.

We flew inland across 400 miles of country this afternoon—part of it a game reserve. Our pilot obligingly came down to search the country for game. I thought I saw a lion about a mile away which turned and ambled off. Not long afterwards my eye lighted on a group of giraffes—no doubt about these. Some stood with forelegs apart, stock still; a few others swerved and cantered off as horses do when a train goes by. Next I saw two or three herds of what looked like buffaloes (wildebeest, I imagine) and, near their feet, gazelle with scuts like rabbits.

(It has just sprung to mind that several of the padres on board ship said they had joined the Forces because they realised that, if they didn't, they'd be out of touch with the young men of to-day and never command their respect nor understand their frame of mind after the war.)

How the wild animals live on this sparse country is astonishing; so much of it looks bare and arid. We move over it at what seems a slow speed but is fast enough to afford fairly rapid changes of territory—a while back the earth beneath such vegetation as there is, was red and as though the ground had scarlet fever—a hectic look about it. Next, it was studded with high crude rocks and the atmosphere turned colder. The journey has been bumpy—during the moments we saw the wild animals two of our travellers had to dive for the lavatory to be sick. Now we're in Kenya—the round huts resemble mushrooms. At Kisumu our R.A.F. men wore brown suède boots to the calf as protection against mosquitoes. We were 4,000 feet up on the Equator, the wind warm, but not uncomfortably so. We stayed the night at Kampala, Uganda—which rouses a picture of a few huts and banana trees. But, in fact, Kampala is a modern town, with banks, parks, and a fine hotel. We were still on the Equator, but 4,500 feet up and the atmosphere might have been Bournemouth on an August evening. My bedroom had three single beds equipped with mosquito nets. Three beds—and a Bible, gift of the Gideons. The Gideons hale from Chicago and try to win men and women (says their Bible) for the Lord Jesus Christ. They beseech me to be diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. (The Ghurkas' Colonel read seven chapters, beginning at Genesis, lying in his bath.)

The Ghurkas' Colonel and I sat out in the park talking of soldiers. His men draw about 20*s.* a month—no more. During last year's fighting on the Frontier, they wore out their boots in two months, but had to buy further pairs at about 15*s.* a pair—out of their pay (much as our men in France, in the autumn of '39, often bought gum boots with part of

their pay). He thinks the Indian Army's junior officers far ahead of their opposite numbers in the British Army, largely because they have, from the first, to carry more responsibility—they begin as company commanders. But he doubts if the Indian senior officers are as good as the British—the climate takes its toll, saps vitality. Talking of curious anomalies, he cited a naval officer who said he had been rebuked for sinking an enemy ship at the first salvo, instead of going through the process of bracketing, one short, one over and then a hit. (This sounds incredible, but he said it was perfectly accurate.) This Colonel brought a party of Ghurkas to England for the Coronation. He sat with them as they drove out of Southampton. " Ah ! " they said. " What discipline ! Even the houses are dressed by the right ! " This infantry regiment plays polo; a subaltern needs £50 to £100 a year private income to be comfortable.

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Sheet lightning flickered in the sky when we rose, as though the heavens were opening and shutting. I slept in the aircraft for an hour or two, but, as usual, woke up when the engine changed its roar and was in time to find ourselves banking low over Murchison Falls—a narrow boiling gap of water from which vapour rose. A moment later I saw that the muddy river close by held a number of hippopotami and crocodiles, many of them pushing out into the stream on hearing our approach. (This reminds me of the naval officer who said to me: " A lot of whales have been depth-charged in mistake for U-boats. Can't take any risks.") Half an hour later, seven or eight elephants were close to us, their white tusks glancing in the light. The smell, as we fly over this countryside, seems to be slightly fœtid, like that of a hothouse—or do I imagine it ? Twice to-day we came down on the Nile; the river surface is dotted with floating debris, canes and sedge and grass, which a launch was garnering into heaps and shoving with its nose towards the banks. In the early afternoon the desert for a hundred miles was flat, with pastel shades of grey, red, brown, black; occasionally there was a group of trees, or a pool of stagnant yellow water. Once we flew through a cloud as thick as fog.

The broad Nile is hardly distinguishable from the desert which it laps. Khartoum brought us authentic heat—we drove some miles to the hotel; warm wind came in through the window, hot as a gust from a ship's engine-room. We had iced coffee, half milk—delicious. I had a bath and worked in pyjamas under a big fan. We sent for iced beer. (The Colonel and I shared a room.) When the servant brought it, he wore shoes. " Wearing shoes on his feet would, in India, be impertinent," said the Colonel, mentioning it for my benefit. A New Zealand Air Force officer had said to me that the Sudan was the most snobbish place he had

encountered and when we left the next morning a former British consul (not of the Sudan) said the place was so *pukka sahib* he was glad to leave. But I observed nothing extraordinary. I was glad to leave because of the heat—found it difficult to sleep and thought of an English winter day with longing. Rain drummed down during the night. An English major was solemnly reading the *Daily Telegraph* for April 17.

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Rain blew gustily into the car as we drove down to the flying-boat (the car windows had vanished, broken and not replaced). Two colonels I saw didn't look more than thirty-five—good that we're promoting them young, though it must be costly. One begins to gather a slight idea of where the money goes.

It was a grey misty morning in the early hours, with visibility no more than a half-mile. One of our travellers who looks something like a poet (a sensitive, keen face) commented on my volume of Shakespeare—said he, too, never travels without such a volume. During our talk, he said he has been until recently in Abyssinia, organising guerrilla warfare. He was a don at Oxford, his subject social biology, but his hobby was anthropology among ancient tribes of the desert—used to spend a good deal of time tramping this desert, visiting tribes no white man had visited for seventy or eighty years. He took a commission in the Sudan Defence Force and, with anything from eighteen to fifty natives, has been attacking Italian outposts, himself armed with a sporting rifle (he'd done big game shooting), his cook with a shotgun and his men with rifles. " We had to get the attack over in about three hours before their reinforcements arrived—we were always much outnumbered. We attacked a place every two weeks or so, and kept a front of about 100 miles on the jump." I asked if he had had any experience of war before. He said, No, he knew nothing about it—thought it best to know nothing. Wasn't it very dangerous ? I asked. He thought not very—the enemy native forces shot so badly that if you kept well ahead of your own troops the bullets went well over your head. The only time he was in what he thought serious danger was when he fought all day, by mistake, against our own King's African Rifles. He laughed over this—he has a good deal of dry, satirical humour. As we looked down on the desert, he said he has found it possible to do twenty-five miles a day on foot across it without loss of energy—one day he did forty-eight miles. He said it gets cold at night—even in this hot weather, he takes four or five blankets for use at night.

The obvious thought occurred to me that he has, in a minor degree, kinship with Lawrence of Arabia. Here he is in civilian clothes, finely drawn, clean shaven, thirty-five to forty, I should say, a man on the Left who felt himself (as I do) having some responsibility for our at last

fighting the dictators, not content to do office or administrative work, feeling he must do the risky, dirty job and doing it coolly, with a touch of cynicism about him, hating and despising all politicians, feeling we have rather bungled things with the French (whose resistance in Syria was far more than token).

The rifles his men had were rather ancient. He was critical of Oxford dons and undergraduates who have muscled-in to pretty safe and cushy jobs (as I am of journalists). I hope he survives; he would be a real loss. He knows this part of the world very well. He offered to join the Welsh Guards, but was kept waiting and, foreseeing this region boiling up, got permission to come out.

In South Africa they spoke to me of the mystery why Italy didn't move through Kenya when we had but a couple of battalions to stand in their way. One of the enemy's blunders, I take it, or a mystery perhaps too deep for easy explanation. The Duke of Aosta spoke, I believe, to his captors, of a complete mechanical breakdown—but whether in relation to Kenya I don't know.

The Oxford don had himself met General Smuts, but didn't form the impression I did—thought he looked tired and less cheerful, but he had seen him a fortnight earlier. He said he and Smuts were both agreed that this is a war of time—it is not enough (in a sense) to win the war, but depends greatly on *when* we win it.

BOOK 2

MIDDLE EAST

August 11th, 1941.

FROM THE AIR Cairo looks immense—sits on both sides of the Nile and with a piece in the middle of the river on which I observe on this grilling afternoon two cricket matches being played, some tennis and some golf. A New York journalist said to-night, after doubting how much longer the Russians will fight, that if they keep it up another month, "we can all go home" (meaning we've won the war). F. G. H. S. tells me in his dry way of the cabaret girl who, after being plied with champagne, refused to go to bed with an officer, who therefore complained to the manager. The manager said to her: "I see you are not *une femme sérieuse*!"

William Forrest took eight weeks to get here—spent a month in Lisbon awaiting transport; then got to the Gold Coast by a Portuguese ship which travelled at night, a blaze of lights and with special lamps lighting up her colours on the ship's side. One day, at 1.30 in the morning, at the height of a fête on the top deck, they saw a tiny light on the sea which began to flash an S.O.S. to them. Was it a decoy? However, they came upon two open boats, rescued forty-five British seamen who had been torpedoed five hours before. The fête stopped, this ship (which carried seventeen nationalities) gave up its jollifications, and an Abyssinian prince produced five bottles of whisky and requested William to hand them to our seamen.

Willie drove me round the town in his car; difficult work in a semi-blackout (Cairo has an air raid warning nearly every night, but no bombs yet—we've said we'll bomb Rome if Cairo is bombed). Pedestrians trail about the roads, an odd camel (with or without a light on its tail) goes by, open carriages drawn by horses trot along, streets are crowded—a touch of Paris about it and a touch of some place like Singapore. Hot.

In the battle of Sollum eight correspondents trailed about the battle-field in a lorry—very risky and somewhat foolish. Soldiers were going in single file!

Randolph Churchill has recently been appointed Chief of the Propaganda and Censorship Department here. Haw-Haw is said to be making what he can out of this and Duncan Sandys's appointment as Parliamentary Secretary to the War Office.

August 11th, 1941.

This appointment of Randolph Churchill's cannot be mentioned in cables to Britain. It is a " stop "—was cut out of my stuff yesterday. I told the Censor it had no business to be.

Last night I dined with the young Welsh anthropologist and two of his friends. The Welsh don is to be commissioned in our Army. His sense of the comic and satirical had full scope in describing how an officer took him to G.H.Q. The sentry said: " You can't come in at this door. He [the Welsh don] is in plain clothes. Round the back's the place." Round the back they went, but here the officer couldn't enter because *he* was in uniform. So the pair had to split up. They met inside in due course, but now they couldn't get out because they had omitted to obtain a pass to enter. The next problem was uniform—our Welsh don was directed to an official " shop " to get his uniform, but told he could not enter the barracks where the shop is unless he is *already* wearing uniform. Finally, the officials said perhaps khaki shorts and a shirt would get him in, but a hat—oh, he must have a hat. He said blandly: " I have an Italian officer's hat. Will that do ? " They were very pained, indeed, over this sally.

We dined at a Syrian *café* under the stars inside a high, whitewashed wall; the meal began with sliced cucumber and gherkins in a cream sauce; after that, two meat dishes—loads of food. I was overwhelmed by it. They said: " But this is modest. In Egypt, your host, when you've finally had the sweets and are thanking God the meal is at an end, will have a turkey or half a sheep brought on."

More than half the food was uneaten. I said: " I wonder what happens to it ? " They said: " We usually dine on the pavement. There, we can take these small loaves [which have virtually no interior], tear them open, fill them with the meat and summon the small boys playing about. The *café* owners hate us for doing it. You must remember the average wage in Egypt for the working folk is about 2 piastres a day [less than 6*d*.]. In no country in the world is the gulf between rich and poor so wide." This enormous meal cost us each about 10 piastres (less than 2*s*.). The preparatory drinks and the coffee and brandy we had elsewhere cost us far more. One of our quartette was formerly in the secret police, now retired; has a house in the poor quarter. Laughter over his ordering a book by a friend and finding to his dismay that it cost 10 guineas. That author (they said) is a most determined person: when you are expected to tea and don't arrive, he comes to seek you in a taxi-cab.

The Welsh don, when fighting the Italians, dressed his men in black shirts and lived on tinned food he had buried here and there. The mêlée in which he fought all day against our own side was one in which

our own side were also (by mistake) fighting the Free Belgians and he (in error, too) came in on the flank ! He finds this extremely funny. I said to him as we sat on the pavement discussing a new hazardous job he has taken on that it's a bit thick that he should be off to do it and William Forrest off to Tobruk, while Cairo remains littered with thousands who never would be missed. He said (quite rightly, of course) that you've got to satisfy something inside your own head—it doesn't matter what other folk do.

Forrest drove me out at midnight to the Pyramids at Giza; the night was perfect. He sang Scotch songs and a Syrian girl and I had a shot at " Ol' Man River " and pieces of *Pagliacci* and *La Bohème*. I walked across the sand, white in the moonlight, and stood close to the foot of the blocks of stone, any one of which was taller than me. The girl had said: " Egypt is a land of death." But preoccupation with death isn't confined to Egypt. To look death in the face is healthy enough; my native heath of Lancashire can enjoy a funeral, right enough.

August 12th, 1941.

I took dinner last night on the flat roof of one of Cairo's hotels; for the first time I saw one of those Eastern women dancers whose method is to move slowly round the arena, smiling, but contorting herself, as though in ecstasy of desire, or pain, or both. My companion remarked: " It's said of her that her navel winks." She was quite pretty and appeared to enjoy herself. The younger officers marked her more jerky movements with exclamations. One or two dancing turns were somewhat amateurish and it was explained to me that some of Cairo's cabaret turns are really expensive *demi-mondaines*, who, regulations being what they are, have to be " turns " before they can sit about in the hotels. A few hundred miles from here troops are grilling in the desert and being killed. This night on the roof might be Paris or some other fashionable capital in peace, except that officers are numerous. I'm told that we British spend in all in the Nile delta about 30 millions a year; it may be more.

An officer back from Istanbul tells me the Turks find themselves in an awkward situation; the General Staff are friendly, but the Germans are pressing them to the hilt, and having, so to speak, moved somewhat towards the Axis, the Turks cannot very well turn back; doubts they " will do anything " to help us. A *Times* article of some ten days ago (he says) did us much harm, for it said Russia must exercise predominance in South-eastern Europe (the Turks took that to mean the Dardanelles and Bosphorus) and Germany must be allowed to exercise her influence in Central Europe. The Turks assumed the *Times* spoke for Britain, and Eden's disclaimer has not completely righted matters. People my informant recently met who had just left Germany said Germany is not

the Germany of 1940—folk are worried, our air raid damage is great, and newspapers are writing of the " invincibility of Germany " to keep up their courage. The Russians, he said, are not short of either men or material and their original tactic of leaving pockets behind the German line works well. A Russian military attaché he met was not friendly, but the naval attaché was (this may be merely a question of personality).

De Gaulle (I understand) asserts that Vichy has not kept the Syrian armistice terms, but broken them in thirty particulars, breaking-up lorries, removing instruments of precision from artillery, and giving parts of mechanism to individuals asserting it is part of the man's equipment. Some of the Vichy officers are impertinent, and they and the Australians are, naturally, not on good terms. Vichy flies the French flag throughout Tripoli and in Beyrouth, and uses flags with " Darlan " and " Weygand," etc., on them; on the other hand, the Aussies chalk " V " for victory on French lorries, and occasionally run a wet finger up their bayonet and say: " You remember what we did to you? " Having watched Australians storm a river, he thinks them the finest shock troops in the world; they didn't wear steel helmets when he saw them in action: they slung a bandolier across their chest, tied bombs round their waist, and carried rifle and bayonet. They didn't employ short rushes, etc., but loped doggedly and loosely on, going from rock to rock. Their bomb-pitching was fine. They said to him: " We don't want to be left here as garrison troops. We're no good for that. We came to fight."

August 13th, 1941.

Last night G. C. came to dinner; he was through Spain and Finland as a war correspondent and is now an intelligence officer in the New Zealand Army; fought in Greece and Crete. Perhaps the most amusing thing he told me was that during the time his men were being heavily dive-bombed in Crete, when there was virtually no respite, he heard the infantrymen saying, as they looked up at the dive-bombers roaring down at them and threatening to annihilate them: " Here they come again—poor old b—— —no homes to go to ! " The idea of mock condolence to dive-bombers is superb. There was irony at the expense of our R.A.F. When his cruiser got to Alexandria, the New Zealanders saw a R.A.F. officer. " Hi ! Jack, what's that uniform? " they asked one another. " Is he a Greek ? "

During a dive-bombing attack one hot afternoon, as C. and his friends lay face down, and with the bullets cutting trees just a yard above their heads, one lad near C. went fast asleep. C. marched about thirty or forty men over the hills to the sea to be evacuated—a grilling, weary march. Some of the British lads complained of the pace. C. halted them and made them open their packs; half of them held souvenirs.

C. spoke of the two-dimensional attack—almost new to this sort of war—of being fired at from ahead and bombed and machine-gunned from above at the same time. Very trying. Thinks the noise as bad as anything—said he thinks men can be scared into defeat without being hit at all. In his view, in Greece, we rather misread the political situation. By the time the Germans attacked, most of the Greek material had been used up in defeating the Italians. That and the fact that the Greek generals were doubtful of heart in facing the Germans—some, no doubt, rather pro-German—led to two Greek armies surrendering. That day, as C. rode in an Athens tram a Greek girl appealed to him: " Why don't you British take over the Government? It's the only way—otherwise they'll let you down." She turned to others in the tram; they concurred. On the other hand, some unexpected high-ups helped our army out of Greece.

In C.'s view, we fought very well in Crete; our men worked hard during the three weeks they were there to make preparations, but our failure to do more during the preceding six months was lamentable. It was lack of co-operation between R.A.F. and Army that led to our failure to make Crete's aerodromes unusable. We had three divisions in Greece; had we had an extra three, we could have held it, so he thinks.

It is commonly said the Australians are magnificent; so they are in actual fight, but in the Western Desert last December and in the early months of this year, the Italians fought but little—you could count on one hand the places between Mersa Matruh and Benghazi when they put up real resistance. This is not to belittle the Australians, but to put matters in right proportion. One place where real fighting occurred was Buq Buq, where about eighteen of our light tanks used by a cavalry regiment got bogged in a salt marsh. Overlooking the marsh was an escarpment where thirty-seven Italian field guns were mounted; those guns knocked out all the light tanks; then, in turn, heavier British tanks came behind the field guns and knocked out each one. The Italian gunners fought well—each gun had its dead gun crew beside it. In that neighbourhood we took 14,500 prisoners, and much material—scores of Diesel lorries, eighteen of which were driven by Italians to take back British and Italian wounded. Moreover, we took about 60,000 bottles of Rocoara water (akin to Vichy water) and stocks of cold ham and provisions. What a tanks brigadier described to me as an epic of a tank battle occurred south of Benghazi (the furthermost point we reached). A road ran south and, by making a circuitous detour, our tanks—fifty-two of them—reached this road and lay alongside it *only twenty minutes before* the head of the retreating Italian column arrived. Along that stretch of road we knocked out 111 Italian tanks, half of which had only shortly before reached Benghazi. Of all those Italian tanks, only half a dozen or so now turned off the road to give battle,

these and a handful of field guns. Not far away was the fort of Zuetina —a regular " Beau Geste " of a fort in appearance. When our troops arrived, they found that a mixed company in that fort—some Sikhs, Greek sailors, and so forth, presumably captured by Italians earlier—had disarmed nearly 3,000 retreating Italian officers and men and taken their arms and pitched them into the sea—one of the more remarkable episodes of a curious campaign.

The armoured part of our army which carried through this successful campaign had consisted of a well-trained armoured division. By the time Benghazi was reached, it was naturally much depleted. There were, I believe, two alternatives (in General O'Connor's view)—to go on to Tripoli, or to withdraw to a strong line at Derna. We did neither —we remained where we were, and the depleted but experienced armoured division was relieved by half a division which was new and inexperienced. Two or three weeks later the Germans attacked (we had received reports of their arrival), and used the methods we had ourselves practised—that is to say, instead of sticking to roads, as the Italians had done, they took to the desert and outflanked us. We had to retreat and it was during the somewhat irregular withdrawal that took place that Generals O'Connor and Neame, with their staff and sixteen cars, ran into German motor-cycle patrols and were captured. However, some of our officers escaped after capture, and I met two of them to-day still very much alive and kicking. One took me for a ride in a new American tank.

During that swift advance to Benghazi, some of our officers and men didn't take their clothes off for twenty-eight days. Usually they had about three-fourths of a gallon of water a day, half of which was used for cooking. Bully beef and biscuits was often the fare. But though washing was difficult, the desert was so cold that lice were virtually non-existent. (So soon as the sun goes down, even on hot days, you need a pull-over or a body belt.) A brigadier of my acquaintance has lost a stone in nine months' desert campaigning, mainly owing to lack of water. Apart from some stomach trouble, he has kept well.

In our last attack in the Sollum area (in June) the enemy are believed to have lost some ninety-nine tanks. We lost a goodly number also, though fewer. We gave them a " knock " (we think) which has kept them quiet since. Whether they will attack before we do, none can say. Their reinforcements, etc., must be more difficult than ours. We've had evidence of their lack of petrol from reports we captured of their own criticisms of their previous attack. But in our last attack we had intended to relieve Tobruk, so to that extent we failed. We ought to have waited two or three weeks longer for further supplies to arrive. Pressure to make the attack came from home, and Wavell does not appear to have stood

up sufficiently to Churchill. Moreover, when we did attack, we didn't follow the advice of our tank experts, who pointed out that when tanks have captured a place, they must be relieved and not left holding the fort as though they are infantry—otherwise they'll be knocked out. In this last battle, a goodly number of them were left fighting continuously for seventy-eight hours, and holding on to positions. At " Hell Fire Corner " things went amiss owing to newly-fixed German naval guns (about 5·9's) knocking our tanks out. However, another batch of our tanks reached Fort Capuzzo and took it, having got there between a cluster of enemy tanks on both sides. (It was mixed fighting—at one stage a tank battle was going on fifteen kilometres behind a tanks brigadier.) There came a moment when our tanks were ordered to withdraw. After they had retreated some distance, our tanks brigadier said that the Germans were also withdrawing and, furthermore, were burning stores. It looked as though they were definitely going back. He thereupon suggested he should turn about and take up a new position, but was overruled. Meanwhile, the sharp-eyed Boche had noticed our retreat, and himself turned about and raced for certain gaps in the wire, whereupon our own tanks switched back and fought a rearguard action to allow the Brigade of Guards to withdraw from a dangerous situation in Capuzzo, which they did, I am told, without losing a man.

(It is plain that not even yet is enough notice taken of our tank experts, nor have we enough tank experts in high command. Some high com manders cannot hear on tank radios. O'Connor, captured, is said to have been worth two army corps to us.)

We have many American tanks coming along. I rode in one to-day. Their tracks (mixed rubber and steel) are superior to ours; they are fast, their engines are air-cooled—a great advantage in the desert, where we've had to carry immense lots of water to cool our own. It was 12.30 mid-day when I rode in this tank, but it was not impossibly hot. Two small rubber fans were whirling between the driver and me. The tank was roomier than ours. A certain amount of sand came in and without the wind screens conditions would be extremely difficult.

It was less hot in that tank than in Khartoum in the open—I was told it is seldom more than 111 degrees in the tank. We charged across sand, and up and down small hills and engaged in rough-going generally; I found it quite tolerable, but realised how vulnerable I should feel in battle; one feels much the same as charging into battle in a motor-car.

The tanks brigadier I accompanied to-day was in command of a battalion of tanks in the last war at the age of twenty-one. I first met him on the Belgian frontier on October, 1939, when we had some fifty antediluvian tanks—and we had not much more in France when the Germans came through the Low Countries. In those days he had notions about tanks of 100 or 150 tons weight.

When we held Benghazi, we were never able to use it as a port—it was too well mined by the enemy and too often bombed. When we had it, the Italian policemen continued to do traffic duty in white gloves—quite pleased to do it. The coast road from Benghazi towards Derna is fine and runs through country which is a delight to the eye after the desert.

I've been talking to a British consul who's had exciting moments in the Balkans. It was he who arranged to put the 74 tons of Polish gold (the Government's treasure) on to an old tramp ship. It was done secretly and the crates had to be man-handled. But in the midst of it, half the crew struck work and half the labourers also. He and two other men found it necessary to go round the whore-houses to recruit labour—it was midnight or so—and dangle bundles of notes in front of men to persuade them to leave their pleasures for a job of work. It was duly done. He says it is a mystery why we did not bomb Constanza at the time the Germans were using it as a base for their stores—stores which later went to Greece to fight the Greeks. They had about 180,000 tons of high octane spirit; the streets were filled with German supplies, and 45,000 enemy soldiers lived in the town of 60,000 folk. The Rumanians were so conscious of having let us down that when our Consul left, a number of people cried to him, some with tears in their eyes, " Bomb us ! Bomb us ! Bomb us ! " It sounds incredible, but he assures me it is true.

August 15th, 1941.

Last night I called on Major Randolph Churchill at G.H.Q., and we set off to Shepheard's Hotel. Taxis were scarce, and we walked for the best part of a mile up the busy Kasr El Eini in the dark, Churchill pausing now and again to cry " Taxi ! " into the night, but without success. This was the first time we had really met, apart from a word or two in the Lobby of the Commons. He's obviously possessed of great energy and has good looks—something of the poet in the colour and cast of the eye, but he's getting stout and, I should say, not yet thirty. I asked if his appointment as Chief Censor is generally known in England; he said he thought not. I suggested it will cause more talk if it is kept secret for a while and then leaks out than if an announcement were made. He said he's no objection to people knowing, but the ban on mentioning individual Army officers of low rank makes it difficult for him, as Censor, to lift a ban. But I think there's rather more than that to it—it has occasioned (not unnaturally) some discussion out here, and an announcement might increase that discussion. He's been out here five months, spent a fortnight in Tobruk (the hottest place for danger) six weeks ago. He came out with a Commando (spęcial troops), now disbanded. We

discussed a document he's issued, giving political advice to officers of the Middle East on the Russians and Free French. One or two sentences are, I think, indiscreet, in the sense that Goebbels could make capital out of them, and to keep secret a document so widely circulated is difficult. But in general the document has in it much sound sense and is, I think, designed to clear the minds of the " Blimps " to whom Russia is anathema. It has aroused some controversy. Let's hope the enemy don't get hold of it.

To-day I rose at 5 a.m. to come out to the Western Desert. I'm writing in a tent (fairly large) where two of us live; the floor is sand, a ragged mosquito net is over the door, my table is a box. An hour ago I had possibly the best swim of my life in warm sea the colour of a peacock's tail and very clear. We nearly ran down a cyclist leaving Cairo. The Egyptians cannot be praised for their care in walking or driving and their taxi-men are the ultimate word—as often as not they don't know the street you want. Yesterday a man took me almost into the centre of Cairo and finally charged into a roundabout, knocking down a cement block, when the place we wanted was five minutes' walk from my flat in the suburbs. Last night Churchill and I finally found a taxi-cab which had two men tinkering at the engine. It would be ready instanter, they said. We got in, sat patiently about seven minutes, when Churchill, furious, flung open the door and got out, asking: " How dare you entice us into your cab when you know it won't go ? "

The taxi-man can be comical, of course. Those I employ often have a small urchin riding in front with them, a small boy in a kind of night-shirt. He dashes off to ask the way, gets lost, and his lord and master climbs down to seek the boy and to ask the way himself. They return, engage in conference, and then drive me round the wrong block. Their English is small. I have no Arabic.

The journey here was enlivened by a breakdown—for half an hour my driver, Jim, laconic, young, out here four years, lay on his belly or his back under the car. It was hot and dirty. I said to him: " Do you ever have rain ? " He pondered that. " The last time I remember seeing rain was in '38," he said. " We'd two showers last year, but they didn't lay the dust." A handful of fig-trees stood nearby—bushes about 5 to 6 feet high at the top: one wondered at the Bible saying, " When thou wast under the fig-tree I saw thee " ; and there were a few date palms, too. At 7 a.m., when the sun shone across the desert for the first time, it was exhilarating. Near Alexandria we passed a salt marsh, the far side of which was purple in colour. Aridity on all sides ; stony, sandy desert right and left, innumerable bivouacs, some as rough as France in 1916. Our lads are brown or darker than brown, one or two Indians have wound a scarf round nose and mouth to ward off dust, an officer in the

Naafi hut (where we lunched) was sitting in his greatcoat, collar up, drinking beer. (The day was damned hot.) At 8 a.m. we stopped for breakfast: poor mangy-looking camels crouched behind the building wearing filthy cloth muzzles like lumps of sacking and uttering moos like cows with sore throats; their flanks were lean to the point of attenuation. Jim tells me he's lost 3 stone in the last three or four years, but has kept well; thinks he's putting on a bit of weight again now. He's been three times machine-gunned from the air and once shelled for three and a half hours—no more than that. The enemy have a go at this camp occasionally on moonlight nights, but there's no apparent damage.

Jim replied when I asked what he does at night, that he reads—no Naafi concert party has got up here, he says. He has a borzoi going blind in one eye, very thin, which sat behind us in the car, name of Boris. Boris didn't like a certain man in camp and in consequence vanished for about a month—hence his ill-looks. But I saw a terribly thin cat, too, rivalling Boris and was told: "They're all thin here." I can only say if I become like these dogs and cats, a vulture will be carrying me off into the sky.

I gather sandstorms may last twelve hours or three days—some are dense as a London fog. A good deal of sand was blowing about when I arrived. I set off with a fine thermos flask of hot tea and at the first halt, with my accustomed skill, opened the door, allowed the flask to fall out and it was smashed instantly.

August 16th, 1941.

We drove out this morning to call on three fighter stations. On the way my tent companion, who was through the Abyssinian campaign (he is sleeping on a mattress and monogrammed sheets that were the Duke of Aosta's, left behind in the Palace, and has another memento—a watch Haille Selassie gave him), told me of curious characters out there; one of our majors walked about with an alarm clock dangling on his finger—so many watches of his had been lost or refused to go that he turned to this solution. The clock went off one day as he talked with the Emperor, who jumped about a foot. My companion's party had 300 camels in the beginning, but all died on the way. "If one camel dies," he said, "the next camel that comes along has a look at him, kneels down and dies, too—it's a fact, believe me. That fine road the Ities made runs from Addis Ababa to Asmara—about 600 miles; there's a tunnel hewn through rock for about half a mile. At the end they've shoved up the names of 200 Ities killed making it. A South African added two more—Mussolini, 1941, then Hitler and a question mark."

I saw a fine tent to-day—an officer long in the East has fixed up electric light driven from his motor-car, a carpet won from an hotel in

Alexandria, a barrel of water, every inch of sand covered and every particle excluded, and pictures on the canvas walls. A veritable sheikh's tent. Outside in a cage he has a mother mouse and about a dozen youngsters; he caught her, saw she was *enciente*, and has kept her. " When they've grown up, I'm going to shove 'em in some blighter's bed when he's tight," he said.

Over a rocky escarpment we drove in clouds of sand to the fighter station. The first, South African. A dozen or more pilots sat about in the hut reading magazines, or listening to the gramophone. The South Africans are quieter than the Australians, but as fine specimens. Their major, a regular, said he thinks the Germans are getting ready for a " push ": this judging by the amount of material and transport you see from the air and by the fact that although we fly low over their fighter squadrons, they don't come up to give battle—presumably husbanding their resources. He said the German tactics are good—South Africans have learnt from them. Smuts was here two days ago and told them the war will be won in the Middle East. One officer was very critical of the lack of co-ordination in the Middle East command, and the lack of secrecy about forthcoming events. A senior officer said: " I hope we attack while it's hot. We can stand the heat better than the Germans."

A strange adventure was recounted to me by a South African who is a flight-lieutenant in the R.A.F. He was shot down in the last battle near Sollum. " I was hit by anti-aircraft fire when about 20 feet from the ground, but I wasn't hurt. After walking three and a half hours I fell in with a tribe of Bedouin who were pro-British. They hid me in a dry water-hole on top of a hill and for six days I existed there, coming out only at night for a walk. Twice the Germans searched the Bedouin camp. I sat in the hole with nothing to do but watch two or three spiders, and to keep a diary which got so smudged with subsequent sweat as I walked about seventy miles that now it's unreadable. I had jotted down my reflections as I sat in that hole—I had thought the British would advance far enough to rescue me; then a rumour came the Germans had taken Sidi Barrani. Anyhow, after that six days, the tribe rigged me out in their native clothes and we set off; for some hours I rode on a camel; after that we walked. I'd discarded my flying boots and they gave me an old Aussie pair; in these I walked my feet to pieces, till I could only stumble along about two miles an hour. My beard and moustache had grown and when I was picked up by an Hussar regiment doing patrols God knows what I looked like." He's back on the job, flying again.

He's not the only officer to escape through enemy lines dressed as an Arab.

This assembly of isolated tents and huts and sand has, in a sense, an Arctic look about it—turn the sand into ice and the same huts would fit the scene. Alternatively, it is like an early mining camp. The Tomahawks

and Hurricanes stand about in the sand, which has been rid of boulders and scrub by Indian engineers. I'm told they level it with a long piece of railway line, turning it this way and that. These Indians must feel at home in a way that no German troops do.

During the morning I met Squadron-Leader Wykeham-Barnes, who has already, at twenty-six, won the D.F.C. and bar and the Croix de Guerre with palms. He looks as though he's stepped out of a boy's story book—nearly 6 feet, broad, clean-shaven, ruddy face, blue eyes, generous mouth, yellow hair. His adjutant said: " He's got everything—brains, charm, tact, he's tough and a fine pilot. His score is about seventeen enemy shot down. I've heard it said he's the outstanding character in the Western Desert." I said to Wykeham-Barnes: " I gather the enemy aren't keen on coming up to fight." He said laconically, " They're playing their own game and playing it damned well." Another squadron-leader said he thought one British squadron could deal with about four times as many of the enemy. He didn't speak boastingly; he's a quiet man.

Our air strength is steadily growing. Some time ago a lone patrol was common enough. Our fighter strength will be almost trebled in the next month or two. We've probably got more aircraft than the enemy and a much better personnel. Some of our pilots were East African commissioners—very fine young men indeed. Shortly, we shall be able to devote more attention to strafing the enemy and less time to guarding our ships; the Fleet Air Arm will do more of that. A South African pilot whom I asked what he wears when flying said: " Orders say we must wear a silk inside garment, a flying suit, gauntlet gloves and flying boots —but we go up just as we are. Yes, it gets a bit chilly when you get high up." The sand-filter the aircraft need slows them up. The air's clear and you can sometimes see ninety miles, but a lad who flew in France said to me that one day in France he saw further even than that. Several lads flew through the battles in France and are now flying here. One is a little dark-haired chap with very large grey eyes—almost the incredulous eyes of a child.

I've been reading the eight points of Churchill and Roosevelt for the post-war world. This idea of restoration of all the sovereign rights to small nations sounds like going back to the pre-war world; I don't like it much. We're in a dilemma—Poland and all the others who're helping us want everything they had before (and no doubt some loot, too). If we say " No," there'll be ructions now which we can't afford. If we say " Yes," then we stand a good chance of making the same sort of Europe all over again, with future wars in wait. First things first, and yet . . . is this the best we can do?

.The South Africans use a good deal the phrase: " That'll be no trouble at all." They use it sincerely, but also satirically. They employ a Zulu word—*prang*—meaning cut to pieces. " I pranged him." Um. Their major has just had his tent and diaries and gear accidentally burnt.

August 18th, 1941.

My tent companion tells me that he carried two baboons right through Abyssinia. First, they caught a male: then decided he must have a wife. They got him one, and locked them up in a room. For three days they fought—the female was scared at first—after that they were inseparable. In the Imperial Hotel, Addis Ababa, he sent for the hotel barber to bath and shampoo them. A South African major (a pilot) tells me that his squadron in East Africa had several pets—a baby lion which they kept for nine months, a cheetah, a monkey and some others.

When we return to our tents at night, we're all delighted to be welcomed by our half-blind borzoi.

Yesterday I fell over backwards in the Mess (the chair broke), but I wasn't hurt—I made a slow-motion tumble.

I went round the camp to-day. Men use square tents like mine, six to a tent; sergeants four and officers two to a tent. The aircraftmen pay 10 piastres a month (" ackers," they call them) to improve their messing —this gives them eggs and other delicacies. Till recently they got plenty of Jaffa oranges; dates will come along soon; tomatoes and cucumbers are here. Washing done by the *dhobi* costs 20 piastres a month (officers pay 30 piastres). For that, you may send unlimited amounts. The doctor tells me health is good—desert sores are the most usual complaint (they don't hurt and therefore spread before noticed), but dysentery is the more serious thing. We've no mosquitoes here and thus no malaria. I asked him what is the best drink. He thinks whisky. Iced beer he doesn't recommend—too chilling to the stomach. He confirms that loss of weight is common—sweating does it. Food is energising, but not fattening. Meat must be cooked the day it arrives, so the principal meal is evening—the men's about 5.30 p.m.

He said: " I like the desert " (this is rather desert *de luxe*). He's got the chance to return to Cairo after four months here, but won't take it. I meet others, too, like that, but the Group Captain laughed as he said: " In Cairo they say, ' How lucky you are to be in the desert—wish to God I was. Excuse me, old chap, I'm just off to tennis.' " I ran into Air Vice-Marshal Conyngham—flew out from England at the beginning of this month; he was envious of my trip by sea. He swims twice a day, lives in a trailer-caravan close by. Very agreeable, polished, courteous (a trifle la-di-da, as a Priestley character would say); made a point of speaking to most officers who came into the Mess.

About 10 p.m. we drove in the truck (how the driver found his way

is beyond me) to a bar-lounge (narrowly missing aircraft on the way). This bar-lounge has been built from wood intended for latrines, part of a lorry, and odds and ends; sides and roof are canvas. There's a bar to lean on and an iron rail for your feet; electric light. But the great thing is the palm tree outside the door—this was fetched over a hundred miles. When they'd got it and dragged it a long distance and told whence it came, they were informed: " Good God, you've dragged it right over a mine-field ! " The officer who runs the lounge talked to me about the desert. " It gets you in the end," he said. " Finally, you can't keep clean enough and you get these damned desert sores. You've got to get out of it."

I asked: " But can you stick it twelve months first ? " " Oh, God, yes," he said. " Longer than that." (There's a curious black insect running across my paper with a curve or angle in his back. My companion says: " No. Don't kill it. Most useful—eats the other little devils.")

I am reminded to eat extra quantities of salt to replace the saline sweated out of me. (The sea water I swallow puts a bit back.)

The Camp Commandant gets a rebate of about £200 a month back from the Naafi; he has now £400 in the bank and will shortly add £250 to it. He's bought two football outfits and is permitted to spend part, at least, of the money on food. He's a good golfer—on two at the age of fifty-three. As a young man at St. Andrews, he got Tom Morris to make him four matched irons—was a pioneer in doing that. Thinks, as I do, that too many clubs and too good a ball and too perfect courses have not improved the ancient game.

In the bar-lounge last night we heard Gracie Fields sing—she kept it going for about half an hour; I thought her worst song was " Nowt about owt "; but she did finely; the woman's vitality and courage, considering her age, are wonderful. Finally, she began the choral setting of the Lord's Prayer (quite new to me). She had got merely to " Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven " and I think we were all moved by it (a deep silence had fallen over the bar—and, outside, the dome of night was studded with a million stars), when suddenly the voice ended and a man's voice announced we should now hear a talk on historic buildings ! We cursed. I thought: " By God, there'll always be a B.B.C."

August 20th, 1941.

A minor bit of air history has been made by the formation here this week of a Royal Naval fighter squadron to work from land. I went out to talk to them—the Lieutenant-Commander who's in charge and a Captain of Marines took up two aircraft and put them through their paces for us. I asked how they like being on land as distinct from an

aircraft carrier. He said, " Very well—nothing like having some land beneath or close to you." A spell of flying from a carrier is a strain, he said. When the two machines revved up their engines preparatory to moving off, the sandstorm they blew up was terrific. (One way for pilots to find their dromes is to watch for the sandstorm a taxi-ing machine makes.) This R.N. fighter squadron will be twice the normal size, will come under the R.A.F. for operation orders, and will be a godsend in relieving the R.A.F. of part of the task of guarding shipping convoys.

I am constantly struck by the fact that R.A.F. pilots describe a lot of conventional ideas as " cock." For example, a wing-commander in charge of fighters—a bulldog of a chap who talks like an Oxford lecturer —said to me last night it's all " cock " to talk about night fighters having " cats' eyes " ; he said that shooting down bombers at night from night fighters is all luck—or at all events, luck in seeing them. One night his squadron at Redhill shot down twelve—yet eight out of ten pilots, including his two flight-commanders, failed to pass the eye test for night fighters. He described those pictures which show night fighter pilots sitting with dark glasses over their eyes as all rot—wanted to know who is responsible for them. He was very critical about the methods used till recently out here in handling fighters. Till now the problem here has been rather the vicious circle—the only way to deal with the enemy is to strike him at the root, but we have not been able to do that owing to the demands made on fighters for convoy work. We must guard each and every convoy while the enemy can pounce in strength on any isolated one he chooses. Rather tough.

(By the way, the Maryland bombers, when in the blue sky to-day, were immensely visible owing to their colour being sandy—why they are not painted blue, I don't know.)

The Wing-Commander, speaking of tactics, said the pilot who is an individualist, no matter how brilliant, is bumped off pretty soon. The only way to fight is in formation—a matter of hard, slogging work.

A R.N.V.R. pilot—looks about twenty-one—said to me: " I used to sell insurance." His eyes twinkled. "I still do if anybody is interested."

At breakfast yesterday morning a young R.A.F. officer, seeing the ribbons on my tunic, said, " Did you volunteer to come out here ? I can't understand you coming into this war." I said something about my generation being responsible for our being in this mess. He said: " It's a pity the older generation doesn't keep out of the way and let us get on with winning this war—there's far too many old men blocking the road. I started as an A.C.2, I know three languages besides my own, and it's

the devil's own job to get a move on. I've applied for a course of instruction in interrogating German prisoners—but in the whole Middle East no such course exists ! "

A R.A.F. officer who served for a while as a London reserve policeman had a beat near Covent Garden. He was put wise on how to deal with a barrow that is left unattended: the dodge is to move it to another constable's beat for *him* to deal with. One night, rather late, he found such a barrow and thus dealt with it, wheeling it round a corner on the far side of the street. But when he retrod that beat an hour or two later, back was the barrow in the identical spot ! " My beat was nearly finished then, so I left it there."

The truth about things is usually first-rate.

I'm amused (and a trifle irritated) by the reports of cricket at the Gezira Club, Cairo. But while Cairo makes merry and dances on the roofs, in Tobruk men are blasted and in the desert men are tormented by flies and dirt and desert sores. Far too many folk think God set them apart to survive this war and to survive it comfortably. The curious thing is that the men holding the dirty end of the stick don't say much about it.

I watched a South African squadron set off to bomb German tanks (in the dunes). The leader said: " I tried oxygen this morning for the first time. Jesus, it made me sit up and take notice." He said to me: " This is a kind of swan song for me—I'm going to Pretoria soon." He went off streaming with sweat, but unperturbed, and he came back all right. They hadn't been able to see much—the first bombs raise such a devil of a dust that the landscape is obliterated, and by the time the dust has settled, they're too far off to observe anything much except a fire. One of the sergeant-gunners is about thirty-five—a Sergeant MacWilliam, formerly a mines manager. A pilot (himself thirty-eight, with two children of six and four left behind in charge of three Zulus in whom he said he has complete confidence) told me what MacWilliam did in Crete. He brought off sixty men—Australians, Black Watch, etc.—in a barge we'd used for carrying vehicles ashore and afterwards sunk by opening the seacocks. It was in but a few feet of water, and although our Navy said it was no good trying to raise it, MacWilliam set about the job. He closed the seacocks and with other men's help raised the boat. Engines were fouled and rusted, but he cleaned one and entirely re-wired it. The fact that only one engine was working made steering difficult, but he fetched the boat round to a landing stage and got it stocked with provisions. They had an aircraft compass and this they fixed dead in the middle of the ship (as far as possible) to stop the steel in the barge throwing it out of accuracy. Then they set off. At 3 a.m.

next day an Italian submarine surfaced and told the officer in charge (he was a captain of Black Watch) to swim over to the submarine. They'd no means of fighting the sub., so he swam over. Then the Italian captain ordered all the other officers to swim across, too. These did so, whereupon the Italian (who spoke good English) called out: " All right, boys—you can go." Off they started again, and did about 300 miles, making four knots, and estimating their speed by dropping cigarette tins over the back and getting various gunners to shout out when they reckoned the tin had floated 100 yards off. Sergeant MacWilliam is now back flying with his squadron. I tried to meet him, but he was on leave.

I'm impressed by these South Africans—their size, their physique, their quietness, their courtesy. I see fitters naked to the waist working on aircraft. We had a dainty lunch — cold salmon, cucumbers, grated carrot, and fine sweet grapes; food and cleanliness a cut above the R.A.F. Mess. They sensibly allowed me to buy some drinks. They told me how they shot up Bardia—they went in through the harbour mouth and only 4 feet above the water to tackle an oil-tanker and submarine. " We came right down on the deck." But the enemy ships weren't there, so they shot up soldiers bathing on the beach and had a go at transport further inland.

The South African pilot talked of sunstroke. " No need to wear a sunhat up here any more than in Cape Town—the angle is the same. Most sunstroke comes in through the eye; so it's well to wear sunglasses."

I went into the Ops. room and heard the signalling officer talking to the bombers coming home: " This is Pitel Tommy calling Pitel William. Are you receiving me? Are you receiving me? Over to you. Over." And then, sometimes: " This is Pitel William. I am receiving you loud and clear." All the time, these aircraft were rushing back to us at 300 miles an hour. Now and then, when we got two answers mixed up, the S.O. would say: " Blast 'em! They're all on the same frequency." This squadron has lost only four aircraft in three months. Two they have no knowledge of; one crew, all prisoners; of the other the pilot is prisoner and the crew killed. The gunners to-day were a mixed lot, some British, some Australians, some South African. I found a blue-eyed, flaxen-haired lad sipping hot tea when it was all over. He said: " This was my first raid. Glad it's over—you get a kinda raid complex while you're waiting." Another dark-haired lad about nineteen said shyly: " Wasn't much of a raid." It was his first raid, too. Apparently the formation these two lads had kept wasn't immaculate, but the flaxen-haired kept saying, looking worried: " Well, I thought we flew as the major said." He wore a puzzled, very boyish look. I'd watched them

coming home in formation and " beating up " the drome, low-flying, and now I saw them—just boys. I can never get over this.

August 21st, 1941.

One or two historic facts:

When the Italians declared war, we had one fighter squadron in the Western Desert, Gloster Gladiators—and two or three bomber squadrons, all of whom had been in the desert about a year.

A R.A.F. officer whose job it is to blast rocks, delving for water, tells me you can find water on the escarpment anywhere if you go down 50 feet and that it percolates up through the sandstone to within 4 feet of the surface. I suppose that's the reason trees and shrubs (what few there are) manage to exist.

Remarks one hears illustrate man's natural liking for the racy and scandalous: " I know there are two Italian girls in the department at G.H.Q. dealing with letters. They may be all right, but . . ." Again: " In Kenya there are chaps waiting on the station to snaffle any new girl coming along. A girl is ruined in two seasons—some men make a job of snatching other men's wives." I hear other men from Kenya say much the same thing, adding that there are a group of folk there who'll have to be cleared out after the war—they're on the fringe of British society (or were) in London, and have gone out because sport is cheap. Trout fishing that would cost a 100 or 200 guineas at home costs in Kenya 30*s*. Interest in the Delves Broughton murder case was deep. When our troops arrived at Addis Ababa, they were asked, not "How's the war going?" but " What happened in that case? " One or two of our conducting officers were through the Abyssinian campaign—one of them a big game hunter. He's a sport in the best sense—he's sixty-four and still living pretty rough. He said that a native servant in Abyssinia remarked to him apropos the air bombing, and looking up at the sky: " But you cannot see him. This isn't a warrior's war. Not even a woman would do that."

On my way to the army to-day, I was taken to see the Staff Brigadier, a youngish man about forty, bright, alert, who explained the general situation to me. He agreed with me that the German blasting to strengthen their position at Sollum would be sensible whether they mean to attack or not. He was frank and helpful. As we talked, General Beresford Pierce came in—a very lively energetic man of about forty-five, rather hooked nose, sandy moustache, no grey in his hair. He said: "The atmosphere is friendly" (meaning regarding the Press), said the Navy has a good Press service, the Air Ministry has almost too good a one and the Army none at all. He asked how many of our conducting officers were formerly journalists (I know of one only). I told him the

ideal is a writer or journalist who has also been a soldier, but that they are obviously hard to find. He said they need at G.H.Q. a journalist who can say: " This and this will interest the newspapers."

The journalist-conducting officer I had in mind is S.F., who started this war as a private and is now captain. He bandaged a desert sore for me soon after I arrived. He had an adventurous outcoming here: one ship he was on collided and he had to return; the next caught fire in the midst of a storm out in the Atlantic and he had a narrow shave—his lifeboat filled with water and he had to jump on to a destroyer, first encouraging an old gentleman of about sixty-five (who was bound for Abyssinia to organise its finances) to make three jumps—three were necessary before he managed it. F. tells a fine story of this event. While the ship burned and the sea raged, a destroyer came up and kept on pounding her nose against this burning ship while 131 people jumped to the warship's iron deck; some broke legs or arms doing so; one young second lieutenant jumped a half-second too late and was crushed between the two. In that pounding of her nose (it had to be judged well, as the mighty seas lifted her up and down) the destroyer smashed a considerable slice of her bows to pieces and finally had to proceed to port in reverse, going about three knots. Thus she sailed some 700 miles. What a tale of the sea ! We shall never know a quarter of the truth or heroism of this war.

My big-game hunter tells me the Abyssinian campaign was something of a joke as hard fighting goes (but there were exceptions—Keren for one). He says there was a devil of a row if we had four people killed. Personally, I'm sorry that all wars are not like this, and our opponents are not always the Italians. They make war comfortable and luxurious when they can. The Duke of Aosta, I'm told, never fought hard against us—was probably rather pro-British. He's now in Kenya and goes pretty well where he pleases, in theory accompanied by an officer guard but, in fact. . . .

August 22nd, 1941.

This morning my big-game hunter and I set off for the forward area in a 15-cwt. truck. At his suggestion, I have bought whisky, lime juice, salmon, sardines, tinned fruit and Lord knows what. He is similarly well supplied and, moreover, is providing cutlery. If we're marooned a week, we shall be O.K. We have beds, blankets, two rifles, a revolver for himself and driver (I, being non-combatant, have none). One of us must sit in the back of the truck in a nest among petrol and this mass of impedimenta. Now, all this is to enable me to get stuff to write an article or two, and I cannot help wondering whether the result is worth the effort and expense. Let's hope so. I suggested we do hour and hour about in the back, the other sitting in front. He's taking first hour behind, so that

I can look where we go. Mersa Matruh is the first place to see (Cleopatra had a bath fixed here). Badly knocked about now is this town, roofless, walls holed, roads christened Blamey Avenue (after the Australian General). Wilson, Wavell are names used too. "Kill that fly," cries a big road-sign. (Wise and appropriate, for we've left poor F. darting to and from the lavatory in red pyjamas, for his innards have gone to pieces. I'm amazed my own still endure.) Near Sidi Barrani are graves of the Coldstream—the sort of wooden crosses we saw in France. This town is a ruin of broken walls and odd, old Archie guns and rusted machinery. The barracks were smashed from the sea by H.M.S. *Ladybird* (herself now sunk in Tobruk Harbour), but in 3 yards of shade from the barrack walls we lunched—cheese and tinned beetroot and lime juice. Three-parts of the beetroot was wasted—the tin much too large and no way of saving the stuff. (This happened with apricots, too—we simply couldn't eat them all. This is war right enough—muck and waste everywhere.) A few remains of Italian vehicles lie in the desert nearby and in two cases the engine-fan is turning in the wind. Our windscreen is badly cracked, and I asked the driver—a fair-haired lad of twenty-one or so—if he'd been attacked. He said, Yes, wounded by a bomb one day and once machine-gunned, but not hit. Last winter it was so cold at night he used six blankets and a greatcoat and still was inclined to shiver. (It's clear these bones of mine will never be warm if I'm here this winter.) Beyond Sidi Barrani the road is awful—we couldn't make above ten miles an hour, and when we left the riddled road to take to the desert, hunting for Brigade H.Q., it was worse, for added to the lurches and bumps was the dust and dirt. However, we duly fetched up at H.Q.—the H.Q. in a compartmented truck, with a typist perched up several feet. The Brigade Major said the Boche prefer fighting in the late afternoon or evening, when the sun is behind them (just as aircraft dive out of the sun), but, in truth, there's little or no fighting at the moment—some patrolling by infantry and a little by vehicles. The other day Jerry sent forward a truck which blew itself up on our mines, tried to rescue it and blew up another plus a motor-bicycle. Casualties are slight—even in the last battle of Sollum one British regiment lost only fifteen men, a second lost thirty and a field company eighty-three, but these last mainly the result of being dive-bombed. (We lost a goodly number of tanks, however.) We shell Halfaya Pass at range of six miles, and they reply. Down the pass, about fifty enemy vehicles crawl each day, not liking the journey much. " We used to have a lot of fun ambushing each other on the two coast roads—not much lately, however," he said.

Since the last attack the Germans have been blasting daily—digging is impossible; if they desire trenches or emplacements, they've got to blast the rock. No-man's-land is about four miles wide, and on each side of it we and they have laid tank mines. The position is very fluid. He thought it unlikely that Jerry will make a push while we hold Tobruk

(and I hear elsewhere that we can probably hold Tobruk indefinitely if we can keep it supplied—supplies must go by sea). The troops keep well, but " nothing heals well in the desert." (However, my desert sore is getting along all right—almost dry.) Now we drove on past a small herd of grazing camels to the H.Q. of the forward battalion, who are Scots Guards. It was 5.30 p.m. and we decided to camp nearby in the open. The battalion H.Q. Company are spread over the valley and dunes almost unnoticed—a small bivouac here, a hole scraped in the soil there (one had an asp in it yesterday). I wandered round talking to the men—they're very brown and muscular, but a trifle " browned off " by the boredom. They were eating their chief meal of the day—stew cooked by groups and tea. It looked good. Each man gets a bottle of beer a day, but it costs 7 piastres (about 1*s.* 6*d.*). Sure to be warm, too. No lights are permissible at night, and it's dark about 8.30, so recreation is limited; but they can smoke. Up at the front they can't do that. The water is salty, but a new well has been opened to-day which is an improvement. (F. told me: " Men here are connoisseurs of water as others used to be of wine.") I asked the whereabouts of a sergeant-armourer who writes parodies, and truck-driver promptly took me in search of him. The sergeant, naked to the waist, leaned against the truck and spoke the parodies—one to the tune " Mountains of Mourne " and the other to " South of the Border." The first was to the effect that Mersa Matruh is a lousy, small place which you can put in a suitcase, and that sandstorms and scorpions play round you all day. This they are fond of singing after dark to the tune of a guitar, but not only this song: they are sentimental, like all British soldiers, and they sing " Roaming in the Gloaming " and that song which declares nothing is so beautiful as a tree.

When I got back my bed had been made for me and a Scots lad in the middle distance was throwing the hammer. The sergeant had said—and my driver had echoed it: " If ye write anything aboot us, ye must tell aboot the Colonel—he's grand. Ye should ha' seen him in action last time—smoking his pipe aw the time and going ahead wi' a rifle and bayonet just like one of us; just lay on his side in a wee bit trench watching the dive-bombers, and cool as ye like. We took three hunthred prisoners—Jerries and Italians—and hardly lost anybody." (They, in fact, lost about thirty. In a previous action, when they surprised the Jerries, who were shaving, they captured a similar number and lost six men. The Jerries looked at the braw Scots and said, " Too big," and gave themselves up. So I'm told.)

We'd been asked to go to the Officers' Mess for a drink. Outside we found the second in command reading *The Times* of April 1st with its leader on the Battle of Matapan. We drank whisky and water which tasted like strong seawater and went to eat our own supper, promising

to return later. This we did and joined the Colonel and about six officers. The C.O. had a talk by telephone, a light growl full of raillery (he's a man of wit). He said he was Eton, Winchester and Rugby (apparently making fun of code names) and had some play with these. The tent pole had been ornamented with a candelabra of three candles, and betwixt two poles a rope had been slung on which two chameleons (in my ignorance, I thought them large lizards) walked sedately, doubtless looking for flies, which they devour. The two (one is Albert) are not on speaking terms, and on meeting, turn about like two sentries outside Buckingham Palace. We stayed too long—the C.O. wouldn't be denied —and got to bed about 11.30 p.m. Already the groundsheets over our beds were wet with dew. The C.O. had been telling us how during this war (he retired in 1937 and came back) he set off for Norway with half a dozen other Army officers in a submarine carrying a load of ammonal, etc. They had adventures on the way and were depth-charged and then dived 70 feet to test for leaks ! He made a dry joke of that—diving 70 feet to test for leaks ! By the way, the men have made a " V " of petrol tins to stick on the escarpment to annoy the *Luftwaffe*.

August 23rd, 1941.

I was roused (but I wasn't hard asleep—I had kept opening an eye to watch the stars) by a piper playing " Johnnie Cope," which is the reveille. It was barely light—clouds were scudding across the sky, and I thought: " Are we going to have a shower of rain at last ? " The pipes blew louder and then died away slowly as the piper walked to far-off parts of the camp. The playing was rather touching out here in the desert—the loneliness, the stars just fading like candles going out, the breeze stirring and the enemy ten or twenty miles away. We got up right away and soon after seven o'clock were off in our truck to the forward company, passing on the road as melancholy a sight as I've come across for some time—fifteen Hussar light tanks which got bogged in a salt marsh in the last battle and were all knocked out. I walked over to examine two or three of them—I've never seen such a twisted and broken mass of steel—black and rusty now, steel hats worn to the thinness almost of paper, piles of corroded ·303 ammunition showing how our men fought on under the tornado of shells from thirty-seven enemy field guns perched on the escarpment not far off. It must have been bloody while it lasted. The marsh is dry now, as it was not then. On the roadside is a grave marked: " An unknown British soldier." The forward company are living much like H.Q. in scrapes and bivouacs. I was introduced to a young second-lieutenant, a Rhodesian, who took a sergeant and another man out on a night patrol recently. They went some five miles forward and then, as the sergeant said: " I could smell 'em—a kinda dead smell." The lieutenant said they were but 15 feet from the

enemy M.Gs. The M.Gs. were dozing, but one suddenly opened up, four others followed suit, then two anti-tank guns with tracer, and next four or five fields-guns. Seldom have three men drawn such fire and maybe it was the measure of the enemy scaredness. However, none of the three was hit. This battalion is spread over a wide area (the padre does 100 miles visiting its various sections). The forward platoons can only be visited at night, but, oddly enough, the enemy does not shell at night and seldom by day unless we " snipe " with our field-guns first.

They promised that if I came again at night I might go forward to the front platoons. We met the Colonel again, who told me that one sergeant had asked for leave on compassionate grounds—he's got a boy of three he's never seen. The colonel had to say there are others in the same boat. He spoke drily of five months' boredom and two days' excitement. He's got a light in his eye, right enough.

August 24th, 1941.

I slept last night in my tent about four miles from Mersa Matruh. About 3 a.m. enemy planes and our Archie awoke me. The bombing of nearby places went on for about thirty or forty-five minutes. I didn't get up. I could see from my bed the wink of flashes in the sky. I'm told there was quite a blaze, as though an oil dump had been hit. I learnt later that there was not a single casualty. The expenditure on steel and powder to hurt a man is colossal. The three Scots who went on patrol had 400 shells fired at them; no result.

I hear the saying occasionally: " Any bloody fool can be uncomfortable at war in the desert; takes a good man to be comfortable." Some men have a genius for achieving comfort; I hear of a doctor who has got himself a stone floor, built a small semicircular bar, etc.—talks of taking it all home after the war. After the war—how often that phrase crops up. Most men assume there'll be an "after the war " for them.

To-day I've been forward to contact an armoured division; took us a long time to find it; I'm slowly realising that I had best allow about three times as long to reach a destination as I am told it will occupy. I'm much impressed by some of our mobile offices on lorries: in the midst of a stony plateau you see a camouflaged lorry and inside one finds a brigadier or staff captain with his desk, his maps on the walls, his telephone, his radio, his clerks with their typewriters—all first-rate. This staff captain I found was a schoolmaster at Tonbridge. He has a brother here with him and another on the way; three brothers in one regiment is pretty good—maybe unique. He told me four tales of war: (*a*) A Captain Peter Dean of the Tanks escaped from Derna and took eleven days to reach Tobruk. He had no water. Each day, by means of

a petrol tin and a piece of bamboo cane, he distilled enough water to keep him going. (*b*) A Captain P. A. L. Vaux, who had adventures in France (not sure if he escaped, but, anyhow, he was behind the German lines), actually lived for some days with the Germans as a German. (*c*) In the fighting at Sollum last June, a young second-lieutenant just out from home who had never heard a shot in battle found his tank, with others, on a minefield. His tank was disabled; so was his captain's. His captain got out, strode over the minefield, was blown up and gravely wounded—leg off and so on. The second-lieutenant at once went across the minefield to him, saw how hurt he was, went back to his own tank for morphia, went back again to the captain, thence to some infantry beyond the minefield to ask help to carry the captain, came back to the captain and found he had died. By this time the second-lieutenant had crossed the minefield five times, with death in every foot of it. Then he went back to his disabled tank and started firing its guns. Throughout he was under machine-gun fire. (*d*) The other day I wrote of the melancholy sight of about a dozen small cavalry tanks knocked out in a salt marsh. This catastrophe was redeemed, so far as it could be redeemed, by the heroism of the doctor of this regiment, his name Dr. T. C. Somervell. This doctor must be middle-aged, for I'm told he served with the same regiment in the last war and, being offered command of a base hospital, insisted on being up in the front area with this regiment. He drove up, I understand, to this salt marsh when the bloody inferno was at its height—Italian field-guns, firing at 300 yards range, had knocked out several tanks, which were blazing; they were in process of knocking out others. The marsh is quite small—I walked over it. Officers and men were in blazing tanks or lying nearby in desperate straits—arms and legs blow off and as horrid a sight as man has seen. The doctor got out of his car, took his bag of instruments, addressed his orderly, " Don't follow me or I'll have you court-martialled," and set off. He got to the first tank. " Hello, So-and-So. Soon have you all right and out of this," and proceeded to do an amputation. On he went from tank to tank till he had dealt with thirty or forty cases, most of them of the most awful description. Shells pounded all round him. He was never touched. Was God with him on that errand of mercy? I've no answer to that. All I know is that I could not hear this story unmoved, and I cannot write it without tears behind my eyes.

British soldiers, being mostly honest men with a sense of fairness, often pay tribute, talking to me, to the Germans as soldiers. This Staff Captain said how clever they can be. The other day, out in the desert, two of our armoured cars hove to in the middle distance. Our troop leader didn't know what to make of it, asked by radio if we had any such cars moving, received the answer: " No." But almost at the same moment those two enemy cars (two they had captured previously from us, over-

hauled and installed with small cannon—about 2-inch) started tearing towards our troops and knocked out two of our three armoured cars in that particular spot. The Germans have another trick. If they want to advance their line at a certain spot—it's an open disconnected line with posts perhaps at twenty miles' intervals—they'll send forward on a flank at some considerable distance off a hundred or more vehicles in the hope that we shall be stampeded into withdrawing at the spot they wish. We grow wise to their dodges. Of their courage a captain of artillery said to me: " The other day a Me. 100 was disabled and crashed in the midst of a number of our infantry Bren carriers. By God ! do you know they fired their guns at those Bren carriers to the last ? All the Germans were killed. I never saw such a mess. I couldn't eat my next meal."

One gets strange little sidelights on life here: this Staff Captain told me he has been sitting writing, but holding a small chameleon in his left hand. From time to time its tongue darts out quick as a knife and seizes a fly. One morning it got seventy-two. Again: when one of our Welsh regiments was at Mersa Matruh they lived in Roman tombs, which they had cleaned out. They found a small Roman Eagle about 4 or 6 inches high, and this they stood on their dining table.

Talking to a Staff Captain, he said: " It's very hard to hit a moving tank; not many of ours were hit: those lost were lost through other reasons—mines, mechanical troubles, etc." (But other men tell me of tanks receiving thirty hits.)

I met a Colonel to-day who fought over this ground, doing much the same sort of work, twenty-five years ago.

August 15th, 1941.

To-day I visited one of our armoured car regiments, the 11th Hussars, who have done some sixteen months in the desert with only about six weeks' rest. I found them near the sea; I bathed with the officers of B Squadron (the sea was grand) and lunched with them. If a man wanted proof of the ability to breed good looks, he could find it in our Army—this Major's keen grey eyes, rather deep-set, yellowish hair, good teeth, and general set-up are handsome, indeed. But the general level is high. Alongside them I am like a bit of string, and now that my hair is matted with sand and sea-water and wanting cutting and bleached daily more grey, I am a sight for the gods. We had some talk. It's a lonely job, this desert patrolling, for your nearest friends are probably twenty or thirty miles away, and Jerry is sitting watching you on a knoll a mile or two distant. We watch him and he watches us. From time to time he shells us, and we shell him. To do that, we have to bring up artillery.

(We need guns in our cars, as Jerry has in his.) These officers tell me that if you lie with your head on the ground you can hear a sound five miles away. (One interrupted to say drily: " You can hear the Me.'s engines almost before they start up." He referred to enemy aircraft, which are the real bugbear.)

So far as living conditions go, flies are the curse. The first sign that your bully stew is approaching (far out in the desert) is a black cloud of flies coming round the side of the armoured car. One young officer said: " I always cut my tins of bully in two, put one half over there for the flies to have, and keep the other half for myself. But, of course, they won't stick to their own half."

On fighting conditions, the Major said: " We get a good many fogs; probably, at the moment, a fog three mornings a week from about 5 a.m. till about 8 a.m. Then, about 9.30 a.m. the mirage probably starts and may last till about 5 p.m., its worst period being about noon till 2 p.m. The mirage makes it hard to see anything—it's like looking at a sheet of water; but it has curious effects: it makes a vehicle appear tall and high, as though it stood on stilts."

All the hours of daylight the troop is on watch; the troop-leader may sit with his telescope or his binoculars to his eyes for about ten hours out of the fourteen or fifteen. Imagine what this means in torrid heat ! Yet these men, after several months of this work, look very well. Apart from bits of plaster stuck about their arms or legs where desert sores are healing, they might have had six months' holiday for all the signs they show of strain or wear. Occasionally, a man's eyes won't stand up to the staring. But one subaltern said he had never slept so well as in the desert, so profound is the quietness.

A day or two ago I went across the stony escarpment with two official photographers to see some tanks in action. One photographer, who has been in Tobruk, said the Germans have been damned ingenious in dropping booby traps that look like thermos flasks and shaving sticks and which explode when you pick them up. Willie Forrest, who has spent two weeks there, tells me that lying on the road to the bathing place is what resembles an Eversharp pencil—but nobody will touch it. He has many good stories of Tobruk. He met an old Admiral there who is turned seventy and who has been gallivanting about with a commando of special troops; on one job the admiral jumped into several feet of water !

The photographer said that the naval officer in change of Tobruk Harbour is turned sixty, grey hair, head bandaged because of desert sores, but who turned out on every air raid and goes into the slit trench.

William Forrest says that after five months in Tobruk without beer, men lose the taste for it, but Richard Capel, who also has been there, says the men dream of beer, and not only of beer, but of a beer hall with

enormous mirrors which they can smash. In Tobruk the men have anti-scurvy pills—nine a week. Water is brackish and rations are, naturally, what could be termed " plain." " Jerry " often keeps a couple of fighters cruising over the aerdrome to prevent our using it for landing stores.

As I sat in our car on the escarpment, our driver talked with a pal. He said that sea-water opens your pores and that *that* causes desert sores. Nothing like the British soldier for rumours and comic theories. I see nobody carrying a gas-mask in the desert (thank God !) and few steel helmets are worn. The Colonel and Adjutant of the Scots Guards went into action without steel helmets—forgot all about 'em !

August 26th, 1941.

My conducting officer to-day has been G. C. Foster, the novelist. He was in the last war (Seaforth Highlanders) and joined up again. After some unpromising experiences in training units in England, where some of his superior officers showed signs of eccentricity, he is now here, looking at the scene with a writer's eye and wondering how many of our people now opposing the Italians fought by each one another's sides in the last war. He has given me some of his notes on a talk with five or six German prisoners. They were of the 6th German Armoured Division, and wore a cap with deep peak (they have no sun helmets, as we have). He asked them what food they got. They replied that at 8.30 a.m. they get bread and coffee without milk (they've very little milk); 1 p.m. bully, bread and coffee; 6 p.m. coffee and meat. They get a small bottle of beer every six days and occasionally a little Italian wine. They had some of our State Express and Gold Flake cigarettes, which they like, and which they said are popular in Germany (this sounds queer). Our lads gave them steak and onions and tea. They licked their chops over that—hadn't had anything like it for a long time. They loved the tea. (They've been told we are starving in Tobruk—living on rats and so forth.) They said the Italians are no good against the British, and that they admired our fighting, especially in Tobruk. They made comments on their leaders. For Hitler they had nothing but praise; Hess they thought a wise man for getting out when he did; Ribbentrop they admired for the way he pulled wool over our eyes; Goering they liked for his airmanship in the last war. One or two asked why Britain and Germany couldn't get together and settle everything ! Speaking of our men taken prisoner, they said they are treated well—are taken to Benghazi, thence to Naples and thence to Germany. They expressed worry at the prospect of the United States entering the war against them, but thought nothing of Russian opposition. They were annoyed at being kept in the desert to fight for the Italians, so to speak,

when they might be fighting the Russians. They were sure Germany would win the war. (Another prisoner taken by the armoured car patrols was formerly a schoolmaster in Kent. He wouldn't say anything worth mention.)

Last night I heard that our troops had moved into Iran, and decided to return to Cairo to see whether it's advisable I should go there. In a R.A.F. mess to-night a flight-lieutenant who used to read the *News Chronicle* when I wrote for it came over to shake hands. He spoke of the difference in discipline from the last war. He told of a wing-commander from Cairo who has visited the desert for the first time. As they bathed, the wing-commander said: " I wish I had come down here before."

" Why ? "

" I shouldn't have made such a B.F. of myself over the phone from Cairo."

I understand that twenty-five men of an armoured division are to be allowed to return to England on leave. They will be exchanged. The C.O. who informed me said: " It's better than nothing; makes the men feel their going is not impossible."

August 27th, 1941.

To-day I travelled by train to Cairo. We had a race by truck to El Daba and if the train had not been half an hour late, should have missed it. The train arrived as my ticket was being made out (I paid nothing). " O.K.," said the R.T.O.'s clerk. " It stays in half an hour" (and it did). It was pretty full—a long train, with soldiers sitting on the steps. (One sitting thus went to sleep as the train rolled along and I went to rouse him—he was in imminent danger of falling off. But he protested he wasn't asleep !) This journey took about nine hours and could easily have been done in four. I had brought half a thermos flask of hot coffee and some sweet biscuits (all I could get). At midday we got hold of a terrible egg sandwich from the canteen on the train. My compartment had two doctors (R.A.M.C.), a lieutenant of artillery and a staff officer (stage type, small moustache but with courage—wants to get a job in Tobruk). They had nothing to read, and we shared what I had—*Twelfth Night*, a Life of Shakespeare, Wells's *Guide to the New World*, *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (in which I had much enjoyed Ernest Dowson's " I have been faithful to thee, Cynara, in my fashion." We all were tickled by this—it struck a chord in most of us).

During our talk, one doctor said he thoroughly likes the desert—he's been there since last November without leave and has refused to come to Cairo when he had the chance. He told me of a desert sport—chasing gazelles in a Ford pick-up with a Tommy-gun. But I doubt if many have done this. He said the gazelles can do fifty miles an hour at their top speed—they need some catching. They make good eating—the saddle is

small, but very sweet. I happened to mention to the artillery lieutenant that I had met Beresford-Peirse, G.O.C. He asked (as others have asked): "Was he smoking a cigar?" As a fact, he was not. He said: "He's the only man who smokes half a cigar in bed before he gets up. He smokes half the night before, dubs it, and finishes it in bed when he wakes up. Everybody knows that." Well, I didn't know it, and I don't swear it's true, either. Others have told me the General chain-smokes with cigars as others do with cigarettes.

The train ran back through the delta—a great joy to look on green trees and crops again; here and there an ox turned in a small circle, pumping up water; crops of cotton, maize, bananas; the sail of a ship moving as though it rode the meadows. But before this we had passed, in the desert, the most shocking shacks I've seen, built of old tins and occupied by Bedouin who've been moved in from the areas we use for our war. They stood alongside the line, dirty and rather pitiful—women in red and women in black, the first (I was told) marriageable, the second not; old men looking like prophets out of the Bible; a few donkeys or camels rooted about or stood watching us.

How different is this war from the last! A rifle regiment took 12,000 prisoners near Benghazi at a cost of three killed and five wounded! But I'm told we've had about 1,000 men killed at Tobruk in five months. But this is light, too, compared with old days. In Tobruk Harbour many ships are sunk and the place is mined—a job of real seamanship using the Harbour. But we do it.

August 28th, 1941.

I sometimes ask myself whether this job of war correspondent is worth doing—so many restrictions, so difficult to tell the truth or even a part of the truth, so many times have we to fight the bad impression other men's writings have created. And then, as now, when I hear that a South African major of a fighter squadron whom I met last week—a fine and charming man—has been killed, all my bitterness is washed away. I think: "Nothing I am doing and no discomfort or mental distress I bear is anything compared with what he has given for me." I feel very sick about his going. He was so full of life. Just the week before, his tent had been burnt down by accident and all his records and photographs etc. destroyed. And now he's gone himself.

August 31st, 1941.

The Iran situation is clearing up (or seems to be) and I am not flying thither, as I had arranged. I've been doing two thirteen-minute talks for the B.B.C.—one speaks to London, where the talks are recorded,

and then they are relayed to North America, etc. I've been getting past the Censor a private wire to H. N. Heywood suggesting he tries to wake up the War Office and Ministry of Supply on the subject of armouerd cars for the desert. I was asked by the Censor to see a G.H.Q. officer who deals with A.F.Vs., and found him a most lively and sympathetic character. He agreed my criticism was quite sound. It's the old story of our failure to realise what modern war is like. One reason for that failure is that officers in the tank regiments (small in numbers and workmanlike officers with not much money) have received slow promotion; they have stuck to their jobs. On the other hand, officers in cavalry regiments have been wont to serve for short periods. In consequence, promotion in cavalry regiments has been rapid—result, cavalry officers have jumped into generals and control tanks, about which they know little or nothing, and towards which they have had precious small sympathy. So in this matter, as in so many others, we have been imperilled by wealth and privilege and the stupidities so often attendant on them.

My colleagues tell me an amusing story about a General's daughter—a youngster who appears to be technically described as " A trooper." They had been summoned to a conference, but on arrival were informed by a major that he was afraid the conference could not be held because (*a*) the General was not there and (*b*) he had not had time to prime the General. Had they not been told the conference was off? They replied, " No." At that moment the General's daughter bounced along the corridor.

" Hello, Troops," said the Major.

" Hello, Charlie," responded the general's daughter.

" Now, Troops, have you been naughty? " inquired the Major.

Troops pondered that.

" Now, Troops, you forgot to telephone, didn't you? "

" Did I? " she pondered.

The journalists drifted away while the Major and Troops went into this weighty matter. Outside the correspondents ran into the General, who wanted to know why on earth they were going away, since he was quite ready to confer with them. So they retraced their steps and conferred. But I fear this affords a colourless version of the episode.

To-night I learnt of a tragic little domestic story—a Scots girl married at Edinburgh an Egyptian medical student who failed to pass his examinations. She returned here with him, bore a child, and when the child was two, he divorced his wife. This divorcing is far too easy in Egypt—the husband says, before witnesses, " You are divorced! ", repeating it three times, and thereupon divorced she is. Her allowance was fixed at 180 piastres a month (9*s*. a week) because she was given permission to live with his mother! For two years she has lived in

humiliating circumstances with her former husband's mother, eating native food, having only one cotton dress and one pair of shoes. Last week she managed to see an acquaintance of mine, who is busy giving her clothes and trying to find her a job of some sort. Complications about passports and the child's and her own nationality are involved in getting her out of Egypt.

This pitiful aftermath of a mixed marriage romance is not rare. A former consul capped it with a tale of how he Shanghaied a British girl out of a Balkan country when her husband was making her life a hell. He got her to Britain dressed in men's clothes, and she has married again and has two children.

September 1st, 1941.

Oliver's school friend, D. O., who is a corporal in the Middlesex Yeomanry, rang me up and we met for a drink. He's stationed some miles down the Nile—says the Italian prisoners are mostly delightful people and are ingenious at carrying out tasks they're given: better than our men at winding wire on drums and jobs of that sort. He said they fight to get on fatigues and will give anything—even up to watches —to procure cigarettes. K. says that when some of the Italians feared they'd be moved to Australia, they buried themselves in the sand, hoping they'd be overlooked.

The number of U.S.A. tanks here or on the seas is encouraging. We shall outnumber the enemy in due course—outnumber him two to one unless he, also, heavily reinforces his tanks. A staff officer discussing the danger of our prematurely attacking, said: " It'll be over my dead body, if we do." A General up the line said to me: " That's always our fault—attacking before we are ready."

The Balkans are boiling up—Rumania has lost 200,000 men, of whom 30,000 are dead. They now have a saying: " We are pro-German as far as the Dniester."

September 2nd, 1941.

To-day I motored back to the desert with Captain Borrodaile, whose job is taking moving pictures for the War Office. He worked for Korda, knew Harry D'Arrast well (with whom I worked on *Cyrano de Bergerac*). Borrodaile is something of an idealist—gets fed-up with obstructionism and red tape; spent some time in Tobruk and wants to return.

It was a hot day, with a desert mirage which turned the desert into what resembled a seashore—a mile away pale-blue water, tents turned into yachts; but, of course, the water was non-existent. Vertical pillars of sand moved across the landscape; sometimes visibility, owing to dust, was fifty yards or less. Yet the desert has its fascination. In peacetime,

wealthy folk go into it, searching for rare stones; desert parties are held near Cairo; near Maadi is a petrified forest with ancient logs of wood now turned to stone and heavier than lead.

This morning I discarded my old Army cap, which goes back to 1917, took off the badge and put it on a new cap. Later, I saw the old cap lying full of rubbish in a corner. What a fall is there ! When I meet colleagues from our days in France they ask: " Have you still got the old cap ? Oh, you shouldn't have parted with it." Alas ! all things have an end and change is constant. How forcibly one sees that in the Army. One meets an acquaintance holding a post, calls on him again a week later and finds he's vanished and his job is being done by another.

September 3rd, 1941.

G. C. F. and I set off to-day for the Scots Guards who hold the front line near the sea. At 4 p.m. we came on a truck blazing by the roadside —it had been machine-gunned at 11 a.m. and a back wheel still burnt furiously. There'd been a fight over Sidi Barrani—about twenty Italians had been taken on by eight of ours and we shot down seven without loss. But the enemy shot up some of our people on the ground. At Sidi Barrani we tried to find out if the Scots Guards were expecting us (a message had been sent). We penetrated a lonely hut with a sergeant and phone and got through. (This is a case of asking for code words, etc.) Being through, I asked for the Colonel by name. This caused some consternation. All officers now have a code number. So we began all over again. A naval officer resembling an outsize Captain Kettle came in to report by phone that 8-foot waves were coming in through the tiny harbour mouth and had damaged some boats. He looked as though he had just returned from the jungle, but his accent was Carlton Club—an amusing contrast. He also looked as though he could fell an ox.

I am moving on this expedition like an emperor. It's only purpose is to enable me to procure material for articles and possibly a broadcast. With me are a captain, two drivers, a 15-cwt. truck (with our kit) and a Humber car. Most of it is unnecessary; the battalion know me and welcome me. A telephone call saying I am coming or requesting them to fetch me, plus a driver and car, would do the job. My captain, admirable as he is, does no work except introduce me (in this case I introduce *him*).

To-night we were taken to the Brigadier's tent for a drink. It was about 9.30 p.m. The tent was in darkness and all we could see was a grey moustache. We had a whisky and soda. He said that a few days ago the enemy brought up about 150 tanks on to the escarpment, but they have now been moved back or hidden. A remark was made: " John's keeping a sharp lookout for parachutists—troop carriers were seen flying

over Tobruk." This parachutist warning occasions some amusement. All the same, it is realised the enemy may try to forestall us—may, for instance, attempt a raid on an ambitious scale. I cannot see how he could come right down into the plain and stay there—he'd have to get as far as, and take, Mersa Matruh, to make it worth his while. He's strongly fixed where he is at Sollum, where his defences continue to be strengthened.

Other remarks heard in the Mess :

" This'll be a dangerous country for mines for many years."

" This is a shooting day—but practically every day is now."

" The enemy shooting is damned accurate. We fire one and it works like a charm. They put one 25 yards this side and one 25 yards the other. But I've not been lucky enough to be there."

" Rain at Sidi Barrani yesterday. Things are moving—a raid and rain on the same day."

To-day I saw three Indians resting in the shade cast by a telephone pole !

I've encountered a Scots officer who lived at Knutsford and is in the cotton trade ! Another growls to me that officers below the age of thirty get no marriage allowance—that the War Office does not recognise marriages below thirty. The cotton man tells me we pay U.S.A. more for American cotton than we pay Egypt for her superior cotton. But probably we pay through the nose in U.S.A.

The C.O. joked about sending up a burial party for us—this as we drove off to the forward company. But danger seemed remote. I have not seen the sun sink so fast as it did this evening—it might have been an acrobat disappearing through a trapdoor. A bar of black cloud crossed the sun. The escarpment on our left had turned into a streak of dirty violet running across the horizon. " A luvly sight, sirr," said my driver.

Company H.Q. was sitting down to supper and we were invited to join in—a small camp table for four in the open, canvas chairs, enamelled plates, a young officer in canvas shoes and a broken cap. We had a whisky and soda, followed by roast beef, peas, tinned peaches and coffee —all cooked on an open fire twenty yards away among the dunes. We, on our side, contributed some chocolate, sweet biscuits, a tinned tongue and oddments of that sort. (If you can bestow a tin of good water as distinct from salty water, you can " buy your way into any place," as the saying goes.) Darkness was falling as we ate and then, taking a greatcoat and blanket, we set off in a truck.

The platoon commander who met us is 6 feet 7—he lay out a day or two ago under a bush for thirteen hours to watch the enemy; the Lieutenant was frozen by night and roasted by day—couldn't move except to roll from one side to the other now and then to ease himself.

He watched Germans shaking out their blankets, and an Alsatian dog approached within a hundred yards of him and then retraced its steps. More important, he watched the enemy practising his zones of defensive fire—from field guns to rifles.

We wandered round the outposts by moonlight—moonlight so white and brilliant that one could write notes easily if one wished. We had no steel helmets—nobody wears one. Men were in greatcoats and cap comforters—some wore sunhats which looked in the ghostly whiteness akin to city bowlers. I saw only one short bit of trench a few feet deep. For the most part men lie out in scrapes no more than 6 or 12 inches deep, with a bit of foliage rigged as cover; or they lie on stones that allow virtually no cover at all. The front is wide and, as the Lieutenant said: " This is a section commander's war here, for on him, isolated, must depend what he does, what action he takes." The sections were under lance-sergeants or corporals, and tough, efficient men they looked, too. Some of these men do four hours on and two off (the normal sentry is two on and four off); those not on duty lay wrapped in blankets, usually with the blanket right over the head. This looks stuffy and unhealthy, but I soon found when I, in my turn, lay on the ground that putting the blanket right over the head was the only way to maintain warmth (if you had any). We came on a trench-mortar group with a lad from Leeds in charge of the gun. " Aye," he said to me, " we get bags o' fun wi' good mates like these." Towards the sea we found another lieutenant, who had had his own experience of patrolling—but a tragic one: they ran into German machine-guns at 15 yards range and his sergeant was hit; they had to leave him behind—no hope of getting him away unless all were to be scuppered. This Lieutenant was extremely busy—as busy here in the moonlight as a stockbroker dashing about Threadneedle Street (not that they do). Presently, the tour over, we went and lay down and looked like the dead. The tall Lieutenant gave me another blanket—I had now two and a greatcoat. I put the coat under me, wrapped myself up and used a small bush and an air pillow I had stuck in my pocket, for pillow. I tried to shield my face from the moonlight with my cap—not much of a success—and then found the cold made me pull the blanket overhead. This thrust my feet out into the night. I could hear the tap of mallets on stakes, the squeak of a telephone asking: " Are you all right? " the drone of a distant aircraft, the murmur of the sea. Otherwise nothing; not a shot. I slept but little. From time to time I looked at my watch, hoping it was time to get up. Time dragged on.

September 4th, 1941.

Before dawn men stirred and I rose—and gladly. We strode off again, wearing off stiffness, going round the posts. We stood on a cairn of

stones near the sea waiting for the light to shine on Sollum—but like a watched kettle, the light wouldn't grow strong fast enough. We threaded our way in Indian file through a minefield (mines look like black pan-lids) and on our return, chatting vigorously, I forgot all about the mines. " Look out ! " cried the company commander. I had mines on either side a couple of feet away. But it was impossible to believe they would blow you up, just as in this enormous wilderness of sand-dunes, plain and escarpment that lies miles away on the left, it is impossible (when no guns fire) to believe death lurks.

We crossed to the left, over the ridge and beyond. Here lies another plain and a salt marsh, with the escarpment, held by the enemy, beyond. It was now broad daylight. Through glasses the Germans must have seen us clearly, did they wish. Before us, on the minefield, lay a collapsed truck and a motor-bike—both used by Germans to cross the minefield and both victims some weeks ago. We walked down to examine them—saw the German cross painted on the truck and, nearby, a linen German cap such as is worn by their armoured-car units. Foster picked this up and offered it to me, but my experience of souvenirs is that one carries them a fortnight and then says: " What in God's name am I carting this junk about for ? " and discards it. So I thanked him and refused it; similarly with an Italian water bottle—an immense thing. Italian equipment, apart from their actual guns and tanks, etc., is admirable, and, in the view of many folk, better than ours. They have an enormous thermos flask, solid and holding a gallon or so. Their water-proof sheets are finely camouflaged; their camp beds are excellent. I meet lots of our men using some part of Italian equipment. The " Eyeties " (as the troops pronounce them) believe in making war comfortable. How different are some aspects or versions of the truth from what one has been led to think ! I thought so again when, walking back, the tall Lieutenant told us of his experience in Norway, where he fought. For the first fortnight they saw no enemy whatever and had two weeks' capital ski-ing. When they did see the enemy we were outnumbered about thirty to one; once he fought hand to hand. He said a proportion of the Norwegians (in his experience) were pro-German and Fifth Columnists; but they were nice enough—gave our men good food. The air was superb—made you glad to be alive when you woke up in the morning—" infinitely better than this place " he said. We suffered a shocking loss in Norwegian waters—the ship carrying an Irish regiment was hit and the bomb penetrated the saloon where their officers were in conference; most were killed. Are we to believe a Providence ordained that, and a benevolent one, or a malign one ?

The other day a Scots sergeant said to his officer: " I'm to walk up this road and shoot a man I niver even spoke to before "; and our driver said to his pal: " I don't know a single blessed German nor never a German knows me. Why should I fight 'em ? " This is in line with the

character in Euripides who deserted to make a special little peace of his own; it is a characteristic private soldier's point of view. But it's a view to be combated, because so long as the Germans follow Hitler, who will destroy us if he can, they've got to be fought, and ruthlessly. But one comes across suspicions of " gentleman's agreements " with the enemy. Two of these officers spoke to me of German bathing parties being seen in Sollum Bay and our not shelling them. They were annoyed about it; one said: " Not shelling them is akin to going out on patrol, finding a German, and tapping him gently on the shoulder." Other officers further back, however, contested the opinion that we don't shell. But, at all events, the Germans do not shell us until we first shell them; nor do they patrol as we do. The patrolling initiative and the shelling initiative lie with us. If we did neither, activity on this coastal sector would be nil. It may well be that the enemy is so busy strengthening his positions that inactivity would, for the moment, suit him admirably.

I asked a knot of men lying in their outpost how they get on for reading matter, for they've loads of time to read. One had a Baroness Orczy novel, a second had a Stephen Leacock, a third one by Tom Bevan (" I've read that one—it's not up to much," said the Lieutenant) and a fourth was nameless, no back or title page left. A library system works—at company H.Q. they had a few books left over after distribution; among those I saw were two finely bound volumes of Thomas Love Peacock's novels written over a century ago—first-rate for a student of letters, but not so appropriate for a Scots braw countryman and, anyway, too bulky to carry about with ease. What they need is a generous supply of Penguins. Near this knot of men was a half-joint of beef (part of it had been cut from and eaten); it was dirty and flies were enjoying it; the sight was somewhat revolting, but the men grinned and said it was O.K. They don't grow enamoured of the desert, though. " Don't like it much, sirr," they reply when I question them. Water is short and they're mostly wearing a day or two's growth of beard, their coats and clothes are dirty and sandy, and they look cheerful villains. But, with the British soldier's genius, they adapt themselves; they've found that if you fill a tin half full of sand and pour petrol over it, the result will blaze finely and cook for you. They call it a " Duke's stove "—whether ironically, I don't know. Moreover, some lad has discovered that if you take a warm bottle of beer and pour a mugful of petrol over it, the rapid evaporation will cool the beer. " Desert refrigeration " this is called. The lads think a 3*d*. stamp on an air letter home is a bit thick. What would they say of the bill of the officer's wife who recently sent her husband portraits of the child he has never seen. Two pictures weighing about 4 oz. cost her 18*s*. 9*d* to post from England by air.

I walked down to speak to Australian artillery. The Lieutenant said that a German shell fired at him yesterday was dated 1914. We fired fifteen rounds and they fired back fifty-seven—two of them very close.

After that, I decided to bathe—I was dirty, and this is the easy way out.

The Brigadier had warned us against the dangerous coast—a security officer came up a few days ago, bathed and was drowned—the undertow is strong. As we drove to the beach German shells were dropping near our guns, but a mile or more distant from us. The Brigadier was right about the undertow—I was but 30 yards out when I turned to swim back, yet there was a brief while during which I made no progress.

Foster climbed the dunes to look at Sollum. From the forward outposts you can see Sollum barracks plainly and Halfaya Pass, of notorious memory, is a whitish streak on the escarpment. Down it German vehicles limp gingerly, and we shell them when they do. At the top a derelict vehicle is like a cockroach on the white rib. You can see plenty of sangars dotted about the escarpment foot—stone circles or squares which the Italians favour as lodging, but we don't think well of them: they've but ill protection against shots and may amplify peril rather than diminish it, since stones splinter.

What a salt edge there is to the tea hereabouts. They say you don't require Eno's ! Men write home saying they are browned off with the desert, adding: "But it'll soon be over." They're fond of adding hints of derring-do, fictitious or not. Doubtless, they feel the need to keep their end up with folks at home; and, anyhow, our soldiers are born romanticists.

Driving back and taking my spell in the back of the truck, clouds drifted across the sky—how blessed they are—and a few drops of rain fell. I hammered on the window and stopped the truck to announce the good news, but the rain was over in a few moments. Back at Battalion H.Q. they reported a good shower the day before.

We occupied the rest of the day motoring to visit our forward troops on the escarpment. The road was devilish—our car got bogged in deep, soft, dry sand in which the back wheels swirled. Our truck, which was ahead, stopped and tried to come to our aid, but got bogged in turn. The truck carries " tins "—long rectangular perforated planks of iron—to stick under the wheels to form a track. We spent an hour extricating ourselves. Why the Army doesn't improve these tracks or chart the dangerous parts, I don't know. Later on our truck broke its springs; we met in the next day or so (*a*) a General, both of whose cars had broken down, (*b*) a second General, who was halted and doubted if he could get on (however, he did). It was near dark when we fetched up at advanced H.Q. in a *wadi*, a ravine-like valley. " All Africa is yours beyond the telephone wires," announced the Staff Major, who suggested that early next day I should join him in his tent and listen to radio reports coming in from the forward O.Ps.

Not much came in over the radio next morning, but it was interesting to hear the technique now common to trawlers, aircraft, etc., of saying, " Lemon calling orange. Lemon calling orange " (or whatever it may be) and then at the end: " Over to you. Over." I was invited to breakfast in a marquee to which, among others, came the Major-General, who was in good form, playfully swatting flies on the back of the captain on his left, and telling me the enemy have now erected some watch-towers in the desert 30 feet high (from which they can probably see 11 miles) and that they have six- or eight-wheeled and four-wheeled armoured cars which are usually supported by tanks. I asked how fast one can travel going up to the front, and he replied that yesterday he did thirty-five miles an hour because he was after a gazelle with his revolver. During breakfast somebody mentioned a brigadier who carries a tame desert rat in his pocket, which he says he'll take home to his children after the war. The Major-General went on to say that in the wire which stretches along the Libyan Front there are innumerable gaps which we and the enemy have made—nobody will use the same gap twice, lest the other side have mined it. Later on, he kindly spoke to forward areas, saying I was coming along.

We drove up towards the front, through Italian forts which are rather like enormous barrack squares surrounded by stone walls unmortared and with numerous small squares or forts built of low stones. After an hour's driving, we called at a forward H.Q. and were given water and petrol (out of the goodness of their heart). Our own water was so salt as to be almost undrinkable, though probably good for health. The Major in command there took me on in his truck with a wireless set in the back; he's an Irishman, rode fifth in the Grand National, has broken his collar bone nine times—he broke it three times in ten days. We had some views in common—one that we are slowly learning the last war's lessons over again. For example, it is only now that we are achieving some real co-operation between Army and R.A.F. " Six months hence it'll be a different cup of tea," he said (meaning air co-operation will make all the difference). He looked up at the sky when a plane came over and said: " For the first time [he was thinking of Dunkirk, Greece and Crete] one can wonder if it's ours." But he was anxious that his forward officers should not " whistle 'em up " (aircraft) until his men really need air support—he didn't want summoning them overdone.

We got a message by wireless saying that Foster had been suddenly taken ill and had gone to hospital, but that my kit was being sent up in the truck. It was now about 1.30 and we had no lunch—it was in the absent truck. We shared the Major's six ginger biscuits and the two lads in the back of the truck—(one from Rochdale who said, " Three parcels were sent me last Christmas, but they're still coming ") made us a cup of

tea. We had now to drive by compass—I sat with it on my knee and the Major drove, but we were a mile out on arrival and had to hunt for those we wanted. We'd seen five gazelle on the way, their white scuts dancing among the shrubs like rabbits; the R.S.M. goes after one sometimes with a rifle and five rounds.

These men are Royal Horse Artillery and among the salt of the earth. They've got most of the right qualities—completely without fuss, lively, amusing, and making the job seem as water on a duck's back. We'd some fun over my truck. A corporal arrived who'd been guiding it, but by some marvellous mix-up he'd delivered it to a Rifle regiment ten miles back. The Major, grinning like hell, sat with a stump of pencil in his draughty little bivouac writing on his knee a snorter to the N.C.O. who'd given the wrong message. Then we sent off a message telling my truck to take itself off to a crashed bomber and there wait a guide. But after that had gone it was said the bomber had been salved and was no longer there! "Well," I said, "if he follows the track on which the bomber *was* but is no longer and he keeps on going—and he can be guaranteed to keep on going—where will he fetch up?" The answer was at Halfaya Pass in enemy territory. "That's fine," I said. "I shall have something to write about." However, the Major got busy, sent off his sergeant-major, and an hour or two later my truck arrived. It was 5 p.m. then and I was famished and eating bread and jam over a fire with the cooks. The Major said they had seen nothing of the Germans for the past four or five days. He put the enemy tanks that turned up recently at sixty Italian and forty-two German. He has a responsible job here commanding various arms—infantry, artillery, anti-tank stuff, etc., gets up in the dark and is never off duty—but he prefers it to Cairo. He was in the evacuation of Greece and thought *that* one really well done—he was told exactly what he could take down to the beach and what he couldn't. They ran the vehicle engines on some cock-eyed mixture to make them seize up—mostly they seized in five or ten minutes, but one took half an hour (a tribute to our machinery). He said: "We sent off our less admirable men and kept the best behind in case we had to fight our way out. As it turned out, those we sent off first got captured."

I sat on a petrol tin listening to him; a wind blew into the 4-foot high bivouac, and it was pleasant. Presently, we drove up to our armoured cars some miles ahead, stopping once on the way because a German aircraft passed overhead and we thought she might attack us. In this area machine-gunning from the air is the worst bugbear. However, she didn't. (We had got ready to run, for we'd no reply to her.) You get a fine impression of speed, racing over the escarpment, bumping, swerving to avoid hillocks, for you've no windscreen fixed and when you're doing thirty you imagine it's sixty. The armoured cars were manned by South Africans, the commander a journalist, formerly chief sub-editor on the

Natal Mercury, with two children back home. All these men are volunteers, and a pleasure to meet. The other day when his major (South African) was visiting them, the neighbouring cars were machine-gunned. The major crawled under the car and found a snake there. But the snake didn't deter him. " He told the snake to move up—and he stayed there. The snake turned a baleful eye on him, but no more. The major got a bullet in the seat of his pants."

We climbed on the car top and had landmarks pointed out to us, mostly derelict vehicles, relics of former fights—one string called " The train and guards van."

The job of these armoured cars is reconnaissance and keeping a tight watch on the enemy. If the Germans made a sweep south with tanks, it is these armoured cars that would give us the news—they and aircraft. It's an exacting task—watch is kept from first light to last; they and the enemy cars sit like watchdogs. Distances are hard to judge: he asked me how far off another vehicle was. I guessed 200 yards, but he said it was 400; we paced another out which he had guessed 200, but it was only 178 paces. Nearby was an artillery O.P. and I went over to that, too. A boy sat on top looking through glasses—a London boy, in for his commission, and halfway through his actuarial exams. before joining up. He'd sat on top for eight hours that day, he said, and had seen four armoured cars (enemy) that stayed half an hour and then ambled off. He's up at 5.30 and remains out till dark, moving back then to " leaguer," finding the way by compass or stars (or, rather, his captain finding the way). What a change this is from sitting in an office near St. Paul's Churchyard and, in some respects, how much to be preferred ! We drove back and after supper (the driver and I shared a tin of meat and veg. and tea) retired into leaguer. With us went a stream of vehicles, guns, ambulances, trucks, Ack-Ack, and so forth—moving across the desert in the dusk like an orderly retreat, or an old-time trek. Some distance back we found the bulk lined up in rows, a tight mass guarded by infantry and guns; we were almost the last in and I made up my bed under the sky alongside the truck. (My sheet is getting dirty and my pyjamas badly need a wash, but I'm very comfortable with three blankets and valise on this narrow canvas bed.) The Germans use this leaguer method, too, but I doubt its wisdom. An enemy bomber lucky enough to locate it would make a rare mess of it—but admittedly it would take some discovering in the dark in this waste of desert. The padre took me over to hear the news on a truck's wireless and on this set (he told me next morning) he heard a talk of mine come over at 11 p.m. But I was in bed and asleep by that time.

September 7th, 1941.

I got up at 5.30 yesterday morning (two patrols wakened me). It was bright moonlight and by the moon I shaved, but far from well, I fear;

whiskers tough, bad blades, a steel mirror that distorts my knobbly physiognomy, cold water, a brush that's moulting, and shaving in an overcoat—what have you ? A decidedly unmilitary person. But how easy it is to rise at 5.30 if you've gone to bed early enough. The padre drove me up to the armoured cars in his Ford V8; we were accompanying a couple of our 25-pounders to do a shoot, provided anything could be found in the shape of a target. The padre is a Scotsman with connections at Sunderland; he enjoys a bit of excitement. We talked on the way up of the effects of the desert on men's minds and views; he thought it causes men to think, throws subjects into relief, puts a proportion into life. " Men talk to me of reconstruction after the war, and I ask them to do some reconstruction in their own minds first." He's been out some months and knows desert life far better than I. He told how men have caught a couple of scorpions and set them on to fight (after the fashion of cock-fighting), but I dare say this is an isolated case. His driver is a Yorkshire lad who quoth, regarding gazelle-hunting: " They start off with jumps 7 feet long, but after about six mile they are getting done in and after sixteen mile they collapse—you don't need to shoot 'em." This sounds cruel and no doubt is, but gazelle are good eating, and food in the desert emerges mainly from tins. So what is a man to do ? The sun was up and a pale moon still hung in the sky when the guns rolled into position. Tints of red and violet and purple were in the heavens. "Look at them two bumps on the horizon," said the Yorkshire lad. Those bumps were German armoured cars. On top of an armoured car (not last night's) stood the Major and Captain of artillery and the South African car commander, and these I joined. Talk was going on something like this:

" They're showing up black now."

" Two rounds gunfire ! " (A moment later the old familiar whanging and a second or two later still, some miles distant, a cloud of black smoke.)

" That'll shake up that crowd."

The major, turning to me said : " This is like big-game shooting—full of surprises."

" One's broadside on—he's turned now."

" Three are sitting behind Tumor Ridge."

(The guns whanged at intervals.)

"Probably be shot at, shan't we ? "

" Shouldn't be surprised. Look ! Those two are moving off north ! "

" Good ! That's right in among 'em."

An aircraft was heard in the heavens.

" Sounds like a Henschel."

" No. It's a Hurricane patrol."

" That's good to hear."

Half a dozen flies were round my mouth and the backs of my comrades were littered with them.

" Those two Met. we warmed up have now moved out of sight."

Suddenly, out in front, about a mile away a cloud of black smoke arose. The atmosphere among us was so akin to watching a point-to-point race that it didn't occur to me, till I heard the crash that followed, that this was a German shell aimed at us and dropping short. Others followed. Nobody took any notice. A South African, brewing tea, remarked, " Bloody rotten shooting," and went on brewing the tea, but whether he meant our shooting or theirs, I didn't know. Another South African was biting at a piece of what looked like a dead goat's foot, but which he said was *biltong*—dried meat. Where he bit it grew red or pink. He said it was good. It looked terrible. In their van was a thing resembling a small black bladder of lard—this was a vegetable sent up with the rations, but nobody knew what it was. " In reserve we eat all day," said the *biltong* lad. " We've got a new bread pudding—we use prunes instead of raisins." Then he added, apropos the Germans: " I'd like to kill a couple of the swine." I said: " I can see over yonder a rectangular building with a kind of turret. What's that ? " " Oh," he said, " that's only a cairn of stones. We've seen ostriches and camels and Eiffel Towers that aren't there. It's the mirage does it." He went on: " We feel very safe here—we're sorry for the poor devils further back, who get straffed from the air a lot."

But I think it's the enormous areas of sky and sand and stone, hundreds of miles of it, that make one feel safe. Man is but a dot there. How hit him ? Besides, the gazelle run about and small brown birds are there—birds tamer than most birds, birds that walk away rather than fly from you, but birds which (I'm told) never sing. In the desert no birds sing. Certainly, I've heard none carolling. After all (as they might say) what is there to sing about ? A piece of desert in a world gone madder than usual ?

We went back a mile or so and made breakfast—mine was sardines and tea and half a slice of bread and Army biscuits (the latter are good). The padre and I shared. He was full of fun. " I hear men saying, ' After the war, when the missis says, " Come to tea—it's all ready," you'll see me taking my cup to a corner of the room, and when the missis says, " What's up with you," I shall reply. " Don't you know the order is dispersal? " ' " He told me that about 60 per cent. of men treated at his field ambulance are shot in the backside—presumably because when we get our heads down we think we are safe. At one time it was thought our men might use the crosses (kisses) they add to letters to signify words in a code, so the padre got over that, not by blotting out the crosses (as the authorities suggested), but by adding another half-dozen kisses !

We trekked back, and I was once more thinking how peaceful it was

when our driver said : " You see them black bits over there—all that's left of a Messerschmitt 110. Our chaps fired six shots at it, got three direct hits, a couple of Jerries baled out, parachutes didn't open and they're buried yonder." Another incident of war, but this time from the last one. The R.H.A. Major's brother was badly shot in the jaw in Mesopotamia—lay out, there seemed no hope of rescue, and, fearing the enemy would get him and mutilate him, he took the whole of his bottleful of morphia tablets to make an end. He lost consciousness. But his jaw was so open and the blood poured out to such a degree that most of the morphia drained away. He didn't die and next day his servant crawled out and brought him in. He's still alive and kicking.

I find I cannot move without being asked to expose this or that abuse. First a captain, R.H.A., formerly on the Staff, asserts there are more officers on the Staff Middle East than there are clerks. A major (also formerly G.H.Q.) contradicts that, but agrees there are 1,000 officers on the Staff and 3,000 clerks, and he thinks numbers should be drastically cut down. He also asserts that Suez port has serious delays in unloading precious cargoes and in ships lying out a week at a time off the port, affording a marvellous target to enemy bombers. Will I investigate it ? I will. I am struck by our thin line at the front and our hordes of officers, etc., further back. There may be good reasons for this, into which I cannot go here, but all the same it looks disproportionate to me. There's something in me which dislikes the sight of these colonels and captains and majors swanking round Cairo with their little swagger sticks and Sam Brownes and shorts as though they commanded the earth. A large proportion have never heard a shot. They'd be more suitably dressed as civilians.

As I sat in a Staff tent at advanced H.Q., General Beresford-Peirse popped his head in (literally) to announce both his cars had broken down. He smoked a cheroot and round his neck dangled a satchel (akin to a miniature edition of a bookmaker's satchel) which, I'm told, is full of cheroots. I ran into the other Major-General, who was charming and helpful as ever. He said that last night a Rifle regiment officer penetrated right into enemy lines in two trucks. I asked how far. He took me to look at a map, measured it, and found it was seven miles. This officer met no enemy, but found where one of their leaguers is situated.

September 8th, 1941.

There's some fidgetiness about enemy aircraft. Certainly danger exists, but I think it small. However, about seven this evening our young driver suddenly stopped and said : " What's this ? " Behind us, 200 yards away, coming out of the sun, was an aircraft only about 30 feet above ground and coming straight for us. The two drivers wisely skedaddled,

but I, much slower to move and, anyhow, half-hearted whether to move or not, hadn't gone many yards when I saw it was British. G. C. F. said he would report the pilot. I said: " You'll find it difficult. We've got no number for him and he'll certainly deny his low flying."

September 9th, 1941.

Bits of history come to my ears as I move about. The sources are good, but one wonders whether 100 per cent. accurate. For example, how, when Neville Chamberlain met Hitler, and Neville asked for a certain map, Hitler threw it at Chamberlain's feet. The interview was stormy, but Neville, issuing from the room, switched on his fixed smile.

Again, that the Turk who led the Senussi, etc., against us in the last war is now Turkish Ambassador in London.

In our last fight at Sollum some of our tanks got twenty-five hits of various sorts from ·303 upwards, but without being lost. High explosives made small impression on them. When a Hurricane of ours was shot up on the ground the other day, sixty-four bullet holes penetrated it, but the pilot wasn't hit.

September 10th, 1941.

Our officers get a fan allowance of a farthing a day. This is supposed to pay for the electric current to drive the fan. Imagine the genius who thought of that ! Probably the same mind which forgot to order tanks.

On the roadside to-day we passed an overturned vehicle labelled: " This is what may happen to you ! " F. says the truth is that this vehicle was not really a casualty, but had to halt for some reason or other, whereupon somebody pinched its engine and overturned it that it might become a horrible example to bad drivers.

A Lieutenant from an Ack-Ack battery on the Suez Canal tells me that, although the battery has done nothing, an O.B.E. and a M.M. have been sent to it for distribution. This reminds me of P. B. of the *Star* telling me how in the last war a D.S.M. was sent to his trawler and they didn't know who to give it to. Finally, they gave it to the cook, who was embarrassed by it. In the compartment when P. B. told me that sat a D.S.O. Lieutenant-Colonel, who told us this: " In the last war, when my battalion held a certain bit of line, the Brigadier was keen on our making a raid and bringing back a German prisoner. I replied that a raid in that spot would be murder, so well was it taped by machine guns. However, the Brigadier insisted. The raid was made, with disastrous results—hardly a man came back. The Brigadier rang up next morning for news of the raid. I told him. I was very sick and angry and didn't disguise my views. Finally, he asked what I wanted as reward. I replied

so many D.S.Os., so many M.Cs., D.C.Ms. and M.Ms. I got the lot, but most of the men who had carried out the raid were no longer living."

September 12th, 1941.

Roads are notoriously bad, but last evening our car flung me, riding at the back, up to the roof with such force that the crash of my head against the roof nearly dislocated my neck. It isn't back to normal yet. To-night I drove into Alexandria on my way to Cairo, had a beautiful shower bath, an expensive but poor dinner, and looked in at a cabaret, where the inevitable two or three officers, rather tipsy, were making fools of themselves. I had thought that, following air raids, life might be damped down or timorous, but there's no sign of that. I noticed only one building, in a poor quarter, that looked as if a bomb had struck it.

September 12th, 1941.

To-day F. and I drove round looking for Pompey's Pillar. I didn't particularly want to find it, but he did. His driver was one of those cocksure lads who know everything, but after four hours, with an interval for lunch, we still hadn't found the Pillar, which the lad insisted on calling, in his inquiries for it, the Pillow. During his barging around he made a sudden swerve left, whereupon another car (Egyptian) ran into us. Not much damage done, but many black looks. We saw a good deal of the poor native quarter; two or three houses smashed by bombs—no more. The water front is magnificent. I took train to Cairo. The chaos round the booking office was typical—no queue, just a solid mass of seven or eight struggling civilians, touts and officers all thrusting their hands into the window. Why our British military police don't control it and arrange a queue, I don't know. The Egyptian touts and porters are the limit: if you don't look out, three or four porters seize a bag each and all want to be paid. In Cairo the gharry driver I took asked 10 piastres when I told him the destination. I agreed, since the journey was longer than these horsed vehicles usually make (for 5 piastres), but on arrival he demanded 15, not 10. He didn't get it. He followed me, protesting. Officers and men constantly complain to me about Egyptian profiteering and racketeering: 10 piastres are charged for a bottle of beer, which, assert our officers, should be 3.

It's a pity all officers and men on G.H.Q. cannot be replaced by those from home every six months. This climate breeds what is here called "*maleesh*," a saying which can be interpreted as "It doesn't matter a damn." The neutrality of Egypt makes difficulties, too. In Cairo Italians still run shops. There's the age-old Army custom, too, of a regiment sending its duds on to the Staff when men are asked for — since no regiment wishes to part with its best officers.

I'm told that the United States freighter, when bombed in the Red Sea the other day, had all her lights on and identity clearly visible. My informant adds that the *Georgic*, when bombed, lay in the moon track.

September 12th, 1941.

We have still got British, Australian and New Zealand troops uncaptured in Crete, and in Greece also. What tales these men will have to tell ! Some are now dressed in Greek or Cretan clothes, bearded, taking part in forays and speaking a few words of the native tongue. Recently a man reached the Middle East from Finland, having travelled through Russia. He says that about 200 Britishers are still in Finland—men who went during the Finnish War to fight for them.

The Greek morale remains fine. Meanwhile, Greeks and Jugo-Slavs are both said to be making claims for Albania after the war. I've been asked if I will see the Albanian *Chargé d'Affaires*, who wants to present his case to Britain. Certainly Mr. Thomas Atkins of Clerkenwell is not fighting this war to present Albania to Greece or anybody else. What an extravagant region the Balkans are ! A man who knows those countries inside out told me to-day that prisoners are tortured as a matter of course. After beating a man horribly, they strip him, smother him in fresh horse dung, which removes signs of bruises, and then present him to a doctor, who signs that no bruises are on him. Indescribable atrocities are carried out right and left. On one occasion in Bulgaria, where he was, wells were so stuffed with the dead bodies of men, women, and children that the stench was noticeable ten miles off. A distinguished scholar whose wife was flung from a fourth-storey window and who was himself tortured, asked my informant in his bitterness: " To whom shall I appeal ? Almighty God or a cultured Europe ? I am ashamed of one thing—of being a human man." While this man was being tortured, his wife was brought in at intervals to watch, and later he had to see his wife raped. An interesting sidelight on war—while the Battle of Britain was being fought, Germans in Rumania were practising on Hurricanes we had given Rumania, learning their weak points and their strength. Rumania's best trick flier was killed by a German accidentally (a collision) as they flew in a formation of several Hurricanes. At the funeral a Rumanian officer delivered an oration saying how they loved the dead man, how he had been killed in collision with one of the unwanted visitors, and how the dead man disliked those visitors. The Germans made violent diplomatic protests. During one period, the Germans rang up my informant every ten minutes during the night to prevent his sleeping; they knew he had a telephone by his bed. When the phone rang he would lift his receiver and hear nothing but a gramophone playing German music. He couldn't disconnect his instrument because it was a time when urgent messages were reaching him.

September 13th, 1941.

To-night when I broadcast to London, three Indian officers who've served at Tobruk were in the studio. During their broadcasts one said their dog Matilda was blown several yards by a shell, but was not hurt. Another said they had to attack the Italians from behind because they always ran away; he said, too, that the Italians always bunched when attacked and were easy, therefore, to kill. A third spoke highly of the Australians, who looked after them like children. These Indian troops, now relieved from Tobruk, came out without a casualty being suffered during the actual relieving—a most efficient achievement.

September 14th, 1941.

I am slowly reaching the conclusion that, far from all men hating war, a proportion of men delight in it. Consider a man who came to supper to-night—not as my guest, but as a person I met. I walked into the room to sign a letter at a time when he was remarking that he was being ordered from Cairo to somewhere or other, but that the place he really wished to go was Tobruk—he wished to spend his ten days' leave there (Tobruk being the most dangerous spot hereabouts). I said that I might be going to Tobruk myself, but that I was not anxious to go. He replied: " Well, I am a killer. Killing is my job. It was my job in the last war and so far it has been my job in this, I had 200 motor cyclists under me." Now this man must be fifty-five years old. He is very grey; won the M.C. in the last war. Has been to France and Norway in this war—was blown into the ditch (as he calls it) after Dunkirk and again blown into the sea (ditch) on the way to Norway. And now he wishes to spend his holiday in Tobruk. He had some interesting advice on how to be blown into the sea:

" Don't wait [he said] for the ship's boats. I've seen too many smashed or capsized. Go right into the ditch and get as far from the ship as you can. Wear as many clothes as you can, for the wind is colder than the sea. [He was immersed in January.] If the ship is oil-burning, always carry a towel round your neck during the voyage, and when you jump into the sea, wear that towel right over your head to protect your face and mouth and nose from oil on the sea's surface. More men were drowned through oil—choking, getting it into their noses and mouths, retching owing to oil, getting panicky through the oil—than anything else. Wear a cork lifebelt and hold it down by folding your arms over it as you jump. You'll go a long way down in the sea, and be sure, as you reach the surface again, to thrust your arms aloft to protect you from what may be on the surface. You'll find, fifteen minutes after the ship has sunk, that benches and various ships' fittings will work loose under water and in their rush upwards will fly aloft ten or fifteen feet upwards into the air and come down with a crash. Watch you are not struck by one of them.

" I was in the sea for eight hours. My private parts went dead first and next my legs. My legs went numb and not for a fortnight did I recover feeling in them. Keep yourself busy in the water or you'll go to sleep and die. Lash yourself firmly to a raft or piece of wood so that you can't just drown when you get sleepy. I built pieces of wood round me and had quite a small raft by the time I was lifted into a boat. When that happened I crept right down as deep in the boat as I could, right down into the bilges to get out of the wind, and wrapped a blanket round my head."

Talking of camp beds, he said his weighs only 7 lb. In the coldest weather in France he got along well enough with two eiderdowns. He praised *biltong* (dried meat). He has arranged to send to Britain three slabs of it each week. It helps to make meat balls, and can be grated and served with potatoes.

K. met at Alexandria men emerging from Crete. He said some of them were far gone. Even Australians were sent to recuperation for a month. Men from Crete were critical of the R.A.F. For two days the town was out of bounds to the R.A.F. (he says). T., an artillery officer, confirms this. This was grossly unjust to any individual R.A.F. officer or man, but following Dunkirk (when those aircraft which existed were in places where our troops did not see them) this renewed absence in Crete and for the most part in Greece, coupled with the over-publicising of the R.A.F. got the soldier down completely. On the other hand, they couldn't speak well enough of the Navy. Apparently, by some miracle, the Navy had a mug of tea for every man coming aboard. The men lay about the decks, and on one warship at least a naval officer kept up a running commentary, reporting events.

Conversations in which pseudonyms are used for secrecy purposes are amusing. Such as: " I say, we've got a—er—er—vehicle here—er—dropped out of the—er—you know—opposite to hell, old boy." Or: " Two grey chariots coming up from the south with dirty washing showing." In G.H.Q. a certain department now refers to its chief as God, the second as the Son and the third as the Holy Ghost. " God wants you " or " The Holy Ghost wishes you to do such and such " is quite commonly used among them.

An Ack-Ack battery which went to Norway was complete with guns and ammunition but the fuse keys were forgotten. Not a shot could be fired.

The Egyptians can be amusing. A correspondent one day got in an old taxi. The driver said: " Please not sit on the left—over on the right is best."

" Why not the left ? "

" She won't go if you sit on the left."

Again: a correspondent whose car had been watched by an Egyptian wished to reward him with a piastre, had no change less than a 5-piastre note and asked the watcher for change. The watcher counted out 5 metal piastres one by one. The correspondent gave him one back as payment. " No, not that one," said the Egyptian. " That's bad." The paper of which notes is made is so poor that a shopkeeper showed me this morning a roll of sticky paper he keeps to fasten pieces of notes together.

September 15th, 1941.

To-day I visited Suez—an hour and a half's fast driving by car. The piece of Suez Canal I saw was a pretty colour, might have been river or sea and was part of a much broader stream—the canal marked off by buoys. I saw a fine ship come down slowly; as she neared me she slung down a boat by ropes which took the water as the big ship sailed on. The bay is large and excellent, but shallow near the shore, so that ships not in harbour must unload by lighters. We've done fine work these past few months in improving discharging facilities—but we were lamentably late in waking up to what lay ahead. The quays have only had cranes for two or three months and to-day there are not nearly enough. We need more motor-boats, tugs, lighters, rail wagons and Lord knows what. We need more and better labour, especially labour supervisors. Why we haven't sent out shiploads of British dockers I don't know, or brought coloured labour from South Africa or used more British troops for unloading. Every day and every shipload of stuff is vital. Unloading stops for lunch, and does not by any means go on round the clock (as it should under 100 per cent. efficiency conditions). American ships are lying here and get bombed. They don't like being bombed, and when they feel delays occur in unloading them, they like it even less. I went out to the *Arkansan*. She was narrowly missed a few nights ago, but pieces of bomb pierced her hull, holed a lifeboat, broke chronometers and injured two sailors—lightly, but both went to hospital, whence one has emerged. The ship's captain said that at Port Sudan, where they first called, fourteen cases of goods were lifted off the ship in thirteen hours; cranes stopped work at 10 p.m. Till dawn next day nothing happened in the shape of work. The captain was fed-up over this. A second captain I visited on his ship said: " We're a mixed race in the States—not one unit like you or the Germans. If, when we get back home, our men get talking about delays here, where it's going to take two to three times as long to unload as we loaded in, and in a port that's bombed, why, that isn't going to do you any good." I asked would those delays affect the shipowners. He said: " I don't think so. Our shipowners are like all shipowners—they'll let you sail into hell if the dividends are good." And

he laughed. He had wit. Talking of German flares, he said: " I hear they bring a moon along with them." The third captain said: " What's money these days, anyhow ? I pick up the paper and there are not any millions any more—they're all billions." The U.S.A. sailors get a special bonus if $75 each for lying in Suez, and $45 for lying in Aden or Port Sudan.

None of these skippers pretended to be brave, but I've no doubt they are. Two of them wore white shirts finely laundered and wore slippers. American courtsey and slow speech and lack of fuss is charming. The first said: " Our men are not fond of being bombed, but they're not running a thousand miles an hour along the quay away from it, either." The second captain said: " We've tons of ammunition on board and it's all under my house "—meaning his cabin. He said: " Way back in New York, before sailing, the ship's destinations are read out time and again till you know them by heart and the men too—Aden, Suez and the rest. But when we get to Aden and the fellas pick up a paper saying Suez was bombed and somebody says ' *We're* going there,' they say, ' Hell, we didn't know *we* were going to Suez. Why didn't you tell us ? ' " He said he reckoned they'd all sign on to come back again, though, when they get back to New York.

Two of the captains are painting out the white superstructure of the ship and making it dark grey or buff, so as to be less visible from the air. They've had an order to do this following on being bombed. They've got a big American flag painted on the side of the hull, but they don't know what to do about painting out that. I recommended them to paint it out; Hitler isn't going to love Americans—quite the contrary. One said: " I guess it's only a matter of time before we're right in "—meaning officially at war.

After a certain time spent loading and unloading—probably thirteen days all told—we have to pay demurrage—about £500 a day for each day spent in harbour after that. As things are we must pay about fourteen days' demurrage on each ship—money poured out like water (if we pay it at all).

The Americans use every inch of space, but I was told they've a trick of filling the odd spaces with flour or barbed wire—stuff that gets badly in the way. The Australians, on the other hand, are using such skill in loading that on one day we got 1,200 tons out of a ship, which is nearly four times as much as on many ships. We ought to average 400 to 500 tons a day each ship—but we don't.

But fine work has been done lately. We've built new landing places, and we've built new quays running out to sea. We're still doing that. But almost everything has been done in the past four months—and the war two years old ! In the last war an Egyptian Labour Corps was available —uniformed and disciplined troops. To-day Egypt is neutral and such a force is not available.

The assembly speed of vehicles has improved 25 per cent. these past few weeks. In May about 120 ships could be seen lying off the port at one time waiting to unload. I couldn't count more than thirty to-day and many of those were doubtless waiting to go through the Canal or waiting orders. But whether we make enough use, for instance, of smoke-screens on moonlit nights, or of dispersal of ships, to avoid being bombed, I doubt. On one ship we need a 3-ton crane to lift a hatch. We haven't got it. The ship's derricks will lift only 30 cwt. The crane we have is a 30-ton floating crane, but it's too big for the job. It's an amusing sight to behold all the wooden shanties, huts, offices, etc., going up along the shore all bearing in some place or other the word " Chevrolet." It's a Chevrolet town. Sometimes only part of the word shows or that part is upside down.

One or two American skippers said: " We feel we're in a worse situation than the British, for we get kicked and we can't kick back." Well, the next logical step is for Roosevelt to arm his merchantmen. I'm sure that'll come.

September 16th, 1941.

Each day the war and Press correspondents meet together at one o'clock and Randolph Churchill arrives with the communique. To-day he said he was sorry to say there was a mistake in yesterday's—the statement that we had captured three German tanks at Tobruk was wrong; the fact was that the Germans used against us three British tanks they had previously captured from us. In coding the message, this mistake was made ! (In fact, the number of tanks was five.)

Douglas Williams, a war correspondent friend of mine in France, and now of the Ministry of Information, has arrived to make a report on the situation here regarding news, films, etc. He arrived on Saturday and to-day is ill in bed with the usual sickness and tummy trouble. He cannot keep even water down. Douglas is full of energy and good sense; he'll do a lot of good.

Harold Denny, *New York Times*, has been to Benghazi in a bomber, and some other American has been to Malta in a submarine. You would think this is the Americans' war, judging by the better facilities their men occasionally get.

September 17th, 1941.

When in the desert last week, a filling came out of a front tooth, so I've been to the dentist, a man with a remarkably flat back to his head; very pleasant, plausible, rather conceited about his work. After he'd done the filling, I decided to ask him to make me a new plate. He took the impression in plaster instead of wax and in removing it, broke it.

I inquired if he would need to do the impression again. "Oh. no. It always break. I fit it together like a jigsaw puzzle. You see—my plate will fit like velvet—so." I asked how many dentists in a hundred use plaster. " Oh, about three, four. It is very difficult. If you leave it too long in the mouth it sets like iron and you must chip it out bit by bit. If you take it out too soon—no good. So I judge it—needs much experience." I agreed to pay £10, but in discussing the hard wear it would get (possibly on Army biscuits) he said in that case he would strengthen the teeth with gold underneath. " That will not cost you much—two, three pounds more, that is all." I smiled wryly at this, so he hurriedly produced his mechanic's bill, showing me what it costs, and he kept assuring me what a good job it would be. He has made it in about four days and when I went to-night he said he had been at work since seven-thirty in the morning and would go on till nine o'clock. " Fifty-eight patients to-day, including one operation. I cut out a piece of bone—it took an hour." I asked what sort of anæsthetic he used. " Oh, local—he say it was beautiful—' You can cut off half my face. I feel nothing.' " I expected my bill to be £13, but in fact it was only £11 10*s*. " I save you something—I find I need strengthen only two teeth." I went next door to write out a cheque, and sent the secretary to remind him he hadn't told me how much the filling job was. He popped his head back, smiled, said: " Leave it like that—eleven pounds ten."

This morning my big-game hunter friend rang up to ask if I could golf, so I made for Gezira, having borrowed some clubs. My balls each had a hole in—couldn't buy any better ones. I am an unreasonable person. After the game we sat drinking gin and limejuice among a crowd of officers sunning themselves beside the bathing pool, some of them with their women friends. Others were half-naked, both officers and women, as though at a Venetian Lido. Now, in the case of officers back from the desert I rejoice in this ability to relax, but I know that about two-thirds of these men have never seen a shot fired and probably never will; and it irks me that they should strut about in their belts and revolvers with their fly switches. One of our censors quoted to me an Australian officer who said he liked the Americans for their courtesy, but he disliked the British uncouthness and want of manners. He really meant their swank. The censor said we need some propaganda to explain us to our Dominion soldiers and *vice versa*. That's true enough. But you can't explain arrogance and swank—it's merely offensive. Yet shove the swankers deep in the desert or on destroyers at sea and most of them would show up well.

This censor lived many years in Japan—at one time held three chairs simultaneously at Japanese universities. We have not played our cards well these past years. He told me we sent two successive professors to Japan, each of whom had been expelled from his university at home.

September 18th, 1941.

I lunched to-day with a well-informed officer who left Turkey only three weeks ago, who lived for many years in Russia, went through the Polish campaign, and so forth—a homely Scot. He said when the Russians began to fight that they would fight for at least six months. He now says that if the Germans capture Leningrad and Kiev it will make no real difference—the Russians will go on fighting, retreating gradually into the interior until, finally, they turn and the flood begins to engulf the Germans. In his view Russia can mobilise something like 20 millions of men, and can equip most of them. In his view also Turkey will never allow Germany to cross her territory for the purpose of reaching Syria; if the attempt is made, Turkey will fight. Turkey's view at the moment is that she is helping us by keeping out. She is in no doubt who will eventually triumph and on which side her bread is buttered. Speaking of the onslaught that will finally be made on the Germans, he said the massacre will be awful; the Czechs, the Poles, probably the Dutch, the northern French and some of the Rumanians—these will wreak a terrible vengeance.

In the last war his wife, who was at Batum, had to eat so much caviare that she got heartily sick of it. (Food was short.) There is a spot on the Swedish frontier where magnificent fresh salmon is so plentiful that the workmen (who are boarded as part of their earnings) stipulate that they shall not be given salmon oftener than twice a week.

We are preparing to send British consuls to Russian towns which have never had one—or at least not had them for very many years.

September 19th, 1941.

My neck still aches following the crash against the car roof, so I've been to G.H.Q. medical officer, a young lieutenant, who tells me G.H.Q. has quadrupled in the past year; about 1,000 officers now and 2,000 other ranks. He's worked off his feet.

The strain to the neck seems to be only muscular; he'll x-ray it if it doesn't improve soon. I asked him about my fingers too—three on my left hand are somewhat numb—the first and the fourth and little. It isn't bad circulation in this hot weather—it is a nerve that's not doing its job. He said maybe I have an extra rib which presses on a nerve (this quite seriously) and to remedy the matter, a piece of bone would have to be removed. On the other hand, the cause may be the heat! I got him to give me another dose of anti-tetanus. To-morrow I'm to be up at 5 a.m. to fly down to the desert.

One of our Brigadiers here recently gave up his armoured brigade because he felt he was too old and didn't know enough about the job—his knowledge of tanks was not comprehensive. His resignation was

accepted and he went home to England. He has now been given command of an armoured division in Britain!

A general of tanks has agreed to take me with him in the next major battle. He said: " I can give you an armchair in my travelling office and a desk to write on. You may at times have to sit on the floor, as I do myself. I begin in a motor-car, move to the office when the fighting is imminent and when I get really frightened, get into a tank." Some of this sounds extremely unpleasant.

September 20th, 1941.

I got up at 5 a.m. to-day to fly down to the desert in a Lockheed Hudson. I found my companions were seven Americans, members of the U.S.A. Air Force—most of them sergeants, and all, I should imagine, technicians. We've had several parties of them. Whether they presage Americans flying with us out here or whether they're merely here to see for themselves how American aircraft stand up to the job I don't know. I said to one young officer: " It's good to see you here." He grinned. The journey was infinitely steady. It took ninety minutes. By train starting last midnight it would have occupied about sixteen hours, followed by a motor-car journey.

I had hoped to fly within the next day or two in one of our night bombers raiding Benghazi. But the R.A.F. have now decided that those of us who wish to fly must be broken in by two or three days' tuition at the air ground. This is quite a good notion. Maybe they're going to teach us to be rear-gunners. However, as this means some delay, I've decided to go to Tobruk. I drove down to Mersa Matruh to find out if I could sail from there. A captain who lives there tells me they've had 2,300 bombs in the past three months and probably two dozen casualties. They received four attacks in a bad night recently; two men were killed. For some nine days there has been no dive-bombing of Tobruk Harbour. I hope they don't signal my arrival with a renewal of it. I understand we've accounted for about thirty-nine of the enemy's Stukas recently.

My driver who has been up the line looking at remnants of German cars left in the desert during their major sortie last week-end, pulled a bit of charred silk from his pocket. It looked like a burnt silk handkerchief. " Bit of a Jerry parachute," he said. " J.U.87. Found some bits o' Jerries and buried 'em. There was a booby trap with a sort o' string. Didn't pull it, though."

One might draw a portrait of a young man with a beard—a young naval lieutenant, R.N., who's in charge of lighters, and talked to me about bombing. " You can graduate in bombing," he said, smiling. A C.O. of one lighter is twenty-one, a sub-lieutenant. He started as ordinary seaman, sailing with this lieutenant, R.N. Two other skippers are North Sea trawler men, tough and good. Then there's the captain

of a little schooner with an auxiliary engine—he's made twenty-four trips to Tobruk—has the sauce to go in broad daylight and " get away with it." The young lieutenant gave us sherry—first I've seen in the desert.

To-night we met a senior air force officer, who talked to us for a long time: good-looking, highly intelligent, professional. One of our bombs hit a German tank the other day and we've had an opportunity of inspecting that tank. " I was glad to see it made quite a lot of raspberry jam inside it," he said—meaning a bloody awful mess. I found his own phrase detestable. I asked him if he thought bombing can win the war. He said without hesitation, " Yes "; adding: " I didn't think so until six months ago." One of our 250-lb. bombs holds as much explosive as a 15-inch shell. Our damage of Germany is very great. He mentioned two towns as " incinerated." We killed in one raid 5,000 people.

He was optimistic about the situation in the air over Britain. " We are now absolutely safe," he said. He regards invasion as " off."

Speaking of the Battle of Britain, he said: " What won it for us was really our ability to predict where the enemy would be and thus to keep our fighters on the ground till ten minutes before the fight. Watson Watt, with his radio-detection (if this is the right description), achieved that. It wasn't our Spitfires or our Hurricanes that won the battle." I said that no matter how good our radio-detection was, if our men and machines in the air had not been magnificent, we should still have lost. He agreed, of course. The Germans expected we should achieve 40 per cent. interception, but no more, and that we should require to have squadrons up on constant patrol, tiring themselves out. They were quite wrong.

Off his own bat, so to speak, he began to say he thinks it a mistake to have half our pilots officers and the other half sergeants (a view I've been propounding for some time). He thinks it unfortunate and bad for efficiency that when the men walk off the tarmac, officers go one way, sergeants another, instead of all being together, having the advantage of meeting senior officers, hearing problems discussed informally and having a chance to ask their questions. He said in his own case he has always tried to arrange common meeting grounds (the briefing room is one, of course) where he can meet the lot of them. Often it has cost him ten pounds a time (in entertainment) to do it. He thought the only reason we have sergeant-pilots is to save expense. I regard this as mistaken.

Italians are now being put into German aircraft with German dash-boards mostly lettered in German. The poor Italians don't even know how to start the aircraft—the Germans start them up and send them off. This sounds rather incredible, this not telling them how to start them. However, we took about a dozen Stukas intact the other day with Italians in them. The senior officer said it would be a good plan to

" crack up " the Italians in order to persuade the Germans to make more and more use of them. " We ought to use the Press in that way," he said, " to put over misleading stuff." He turned to me and asked, didn't I think so. I said it was right enough for propaganda folk to do it, but I wouldn't do it under my own name—not deliberately lie under my own name. One or two colleagues were highly indignant with me, asserting loudly that they would gladly perjure themselves time after time if it would help the war. It's a difficult business. I remember saying to Philip Gibbs one day in France that I would lie my head off if it would save my son's life in the war by misleading the enemy. But I doubt that, too. For one thing, it wouldn't achieve its object for long. In this case, for instance, the Germans know well enough what the Italians amount to in efficiency and courage in the air. Barefaced lying on our part would probably not deceive them. Nor can you continue deceiving folk for very long. Gibbs once talked about the integrity of the printed word; and I think he is right.

G. C. F., driving to Alexandria with me, said: " Look at those women carrying petrol tins on their heads across the desert. Here's a fit subject for a modern artist—an Eastern woman carrying a petrol tin instead of a ewer. I've only seen one woman carrying a ewer since I came to this country." Petrol tins are used for manifold purposes—building walls and huts, shelves, lamp reflectors and, of course, they hold all our water.

When the enemy made his sortie into our territory last week-end he came with 500 vehicles, including about eighty tanks, in about five columns. He penetrated about thirty-five miles, stopped and turned back—possibly asked himself: " What do we do now? " We bombed him well—forty-eight bombs on a lump of his stuff knocking out at least fifteen trucks, etc. He lost not fewer than ten tanks—one of them a big one captured intact with its crew. Our own forces withdrew in face of his oncoming and then followed up his retreat. We lost an armoured car and some few men. Unfortunately, in the retreat we " oiled " one of our wells and for a week or two it will be U.S. (unserviceable). The water there was darned salt before; now both salt and oil! However, we came out of the show well—the enemy will be licking his wounds, I dare say, and the German and Italian relations will be worse (if that's possible).

The naval Press Officer at Alexandria has been (in the kindness of his heart) trying to persuade me not to go to Tobruk—on the ground that I'm not fit enough and not nimble enough on my pins, and that I shall have nobody to assist me with baggage. I replied that I've cut my baggage to a minimum—I'm taking no bed or blankets, no typewriter, not even my binoculars. What I have I can, at a pinch, carry. As for the hazards, they are no worse for me than anybody else. The Movement Control Officer is most obliging—I am to meet him at 6.30 a.m. on the quay.

September 22nd, 1941.

I'm in Tobruk right enough. An astonishingly quiet voyage. (This word "astonishing" reminds me of the story told in *Arctic Village*, by Robert Marshall—a fine little book. A man was found by his wife in bed with another woman. His wife said to him: "I am surprised." He responded: "Madam, if you were better acquainted with our superb language, you would realise that it is I who am surprised and that you are astonished.") I travelled on a warship—after dark we licked along well over thirty knots. Leaving Alexandria, our crew came to attention several times as we passed other warships—among them the French ones lying idle. I heard pipes sounding on the French ships, so I presume they returned the compliment. What a miserable and humiliating situation these men occupy—a soul-destroying business. Incidentally, their ships don't look equal to ours—they look high out of the water and vulnerable and topheavy. The only other officer going with me is a R.A.M.C. major—an Ulsterman whose speciality is hygiene. My arm is stiff after the anti-tetanus injection—somewhat swollen too, but he says it'll wear off. Spray came over the bows—it was choppy in the early hours—and drenched us to midships. Other ships wore a veil of spray as though they were brides—a grand sight. On these ships the crew are as much like mechanics as sailors; half of them wear boiler suits and broken canvas shoes. A few have little cocky hats and all wear a wispy Mae West round their waist. An officer says: "After one o'clock you need to have your lifebelt handy."

At 9.30 a.m., as I sat in the ward-room, there was a terrific crack overhead. An officer grinned and said: "Cargo shifting." Another officer remarked: "I've seen you before. Were you ever at Brest?" It turns out he was on the destroyer of which I inquired (when being evacuated), "How soon are you leaving?" This ship was at Crete, too. He said: "There it was fifty-fifty whether we got away with it, because at dawn and dusk we were right under the enemy's nose, but our lads were quite good. They say some funny things. A plane would come over. A lad would look up and say: 'That's a friendly one.' Just afterwards it would drop a bomb. Another lad would thereupon say: 'Aye, a nice friendly 'un, that.'"

A diver sat on the swaying deck cleaning verdigris from his round globular helmet with a screwdriver. We chatted a while—a Somerset man. "We're nearly all West-country men in this ship," he said. He went on: "Jerry's artful—he likes to come after us just before dawn, when our wake shows up. But he's shy—won't come when the fighters is there. One night he dropped a flare over us in Tobruk, but he didn't follow it up. The Ities stay up a mile high—you can't see 'em. Once an Iti dropped two tinned fish wot run alongside and exploded beyond. We been attacked four times in seven trips—we've had a few near

misses. We're a bit slow to-day 'cos of the weather." He said what he liked best in the trip was to hear the unloading at night—bump, clatter, bump as they go down the shutes in the dark. " I've seen Tobruk by dark, but never by daylight—you can see the wrecks—masts stuck up all over the harbour."

A gunnery lieutenant who had a trick of breaking into laughter said that once two Italians came quite low—about 200 feet. " I didn't feel at all frightened—it was like shooting pigeons. We could see our pom-pom tracer going into one of 'em, and we expected it to crash, but it didn't—it just sheered off."

I sat on the deck and found myself near an oil vent, which after a time nearly turned me sick. This and the ship's rolling made lunch a trial—I sat down to it, but managed nothing better than a cream cracker and had to rise. After that I lounged on a sack of potatoes on deck and slept in the sun. An officer commented: " They usually attack us in the failing light—last time it was soon after 4 p.m. They throw a few things at us."

It was during my spell on the bridge that the only bomb was dropped; we had been watching the skies, for the enemy is regular both in his times and place of attack. Suddenly somebody said: " One right over-head." I looked up into the blue, but could pick out nothing. Then a corner of my eye saw a column of smoke and water rising silently in the air half a mile on our starboard bow. After that, the crash of it. A few shells were popped off, a ship to our right did a curve in the water, changing course a bit—and that was all. We continued to watch the skies for our Tomahawks or Hurricanes, but none came—not for another hour. " Just a lavatory raid," said the Commander drily. But he didn't like it any more than I did. All the same, it's about a million to one against a lone bomber such as this hitting us.

The Commander told me an amusing tale of one of our destroyers with its vacuum system all wrong—it was to go in for refit. But a bomb dropped near it and put its vacuum system right as a trivet—the ship promptly did an extra four or five knots an hour. I should say this Commander is Irish—there's a touch of the dandy about him. Soon after the bombing a captain turned up on the bridge—youngish, fair, blue eyes and needing dynamite to shift him. No doubt about a lot of these men being out of the " top drawer." The Second Engineer has spent five months at Tobruk—was there in the early days when a hundred men from Admiralty House—naval odds and sods, so to speak—sallied forth with Italian rifles and bayonets to help in the scrap; but were not needed, after all.

I went down to the boiler-rooms and engine-rooms with the Lieutenant-Commander, who, until war came, worked for the Imperial Tobacco Co. He gave me a pair of leather gloves " because the rails will be hot." To reach the boiler-rooms we passed through an air lock—you have to swallow akin to going down a coal-pit. I asked what heat the

boilers achieve—I think he replied 4,000 degrees. It was mighty hot. I asked some of the men how they like going to Tobruk. They replied: " Might be worse " or " Can't grumble." I told the Lieutenant-Commander about the Lancashire mill manager who said his weavers could hear better in the noisy shed than in the street. The Lieutenant-Commander thought that was true enough—it applied to his own men. The Second Engineer told me of finding an artificer laughing all over his face after a bombing. " What are you laughing at ? " he was asked. " I like a bit of excitement," he answered. The Second Engineer went on: " Everybody takes a hand in the unloading—just a skeleton engine-room staff is left; the rest all work, along with sick bay stewards—the whole bag of tricks. We think of calling her the s.s. ——" I've forgotten to note that while on the bridge a breathless seaman arrived to say that a lad had caught his hand in the radio mechanism and was having hysterics. Instantly an officer walked to the loudspeaker and broadcast all over the ship: " Medical officer required at once in the wireless room, please." I thought: " That's fine." Meanwhile the officer of the watch was going on quietly saying to the helmsman: " Starboard, ten—midships"—and so forth.

The sea went down a bit and I enjoyed my supper—cold meats, tomatoes, etc. We moved slowly into Tobruk. I had firmly got it into my head that Tobruk Harbour is about the size of the harbour at Douglas, Isle of Man—a waistcoat-pocket harbour. In fact, it is three miles long and a mile broad—a very fine harbour indeed and, despite all its wrecks, still spacious. Everything was quiet—no air raid was on, no banging of guns. A cloudy night, but with stars. Here's a target on the enemy doorstep—and quietness reigned. Strange.

Troops came aboard us over the ship's side—up a vertical ladder, wearing their full equipment and with a rifle slung across their back; it required two men to pull them over the rail. I looked down the steep ladder into the dim lighter below—it looked a devil of a long way down. I had my bulky rucksack, my brief case, my water bottle, my steel helmet, and was wearing a greatcoat. I didn't like the look of it in the dark.

" Is there no other way of getting off ? " I asked a corporal from the Shore Movement Control.

" No, sir."

" If you'd a general aboard, he wouldn't go down that way, would he ? "

" Have to, sir."

" Why don't you bring a launch or a rowing boat round to the stern, which is comparatively near to the water ? "

" Unloading stores there, sir."

" Um."

Prodigies of skill were being performed elsewhere slinging stuff into

lighters; a midshipman was using a sheet of white paper as signal. " Hi ! for Christ's sake ! " a voice would mutter. " Up she goes, Charlie." Bump, clatter, bump, mutterings, imprecations, bangings; all mysterious in the dark. Any moment the bombers might be over. Um.

I had to get off. I dropped my rucksack overboard into the lighter and hoped for the best; fastened tin-hat to one shoulder strap, brief case to another and, feeling like a Christmas tree, I clambered over the thin wire rail. Two sailors held me as my feet groped for the ladder, and the ladder (which didn't reach the lighter's deck) was held firm below. I got down. We waited in the lighter an age to be sure we weren't needed for anything else. Finally, chugged ashore; met my conducting officer, who hadn't expected me (a signal had been sent that I was not to come—the General has stopped correspondents coming for the time being), and started off in a truck for our camp some miles out. It was a crazy ride—at a walking pace, over an escarpment of rocks and bumps and sandy holes; sometimes we leaned at an angle of 45 degrees right or left. " Now we're on the dance floor," said my companion, and bumpty-bump we went up and down half a dozen times, quite laughably. Suddenly in the distance on our left (it didn't look more than a mile off, but was nearer ten miles) a star rose in the sky, hung and died. It was a Very light in the salient. " A bit of old Western Front war goes on over there," he said. Finally, we got to camp. Our driver, an Australian sergeant, boiled water on a primus and made cocoa. Rum was going, too. I heard the Australian phrase, " Bomb happy," for those who're unduly nervous; heard how the Aussies cry cheerily to newcomers: " You'll be sorry "; went off to my tent, for which the sergeant borrowed blankets; made up a bed in the dark with the help of intermittent flashes from my torch, and turned in. My feet stuck out of the bed; but I slept all right.

September 23rd, 1941.

At five a.m. a deuce of a racket—gunfire, some bombs in the distance, the ping of ricochets, but I was too sleepy to trouble. My tent is dug in 3 feet down. During breakfast of steak and onions, porridge, jam and bread and butter and salty tea, my companions suddenly dived to the floor and I after them, for the bomb was pretty close. We rose, laughed, and went on talking. Some remarks: " Jerry is quiet when we are." " Jerry is quiet these past few days." One officer, a captain, has just been court-martialled for gambling with his men, playing " two up." He's an Australian. Gambling is forbidden in the Australian Army. Is this wise ? You can't stop soldiers from gambling. In the South African war they even gambled on lice—drew a ring and gambled which louse would crawl out first. In the British Army the game of housey-housey is legitimate. Best make some simple gambling game legitimate and outlaw the others. This captain pleaded, I believe, that gambling is inevitable and

the best thing is to join in the game and control it. That argument didn't avail him, however. (I hear of an officer running " Beetle races.")

Two enemy heavy guns shell the harbour. We've christened them Bardia Bill and Salient Sue.

A War Office photographer tells me what poor shape Italian prisoners have been in—boots broken, looking underfed. An Italian officer said: " It's not that I'm withholding information from you about German equipment. It is that we are not allowed near it." Another incident: An Australian soldier was wounded, placed on a stretcher, but in the battle he was overlooked and left behind. He picked up his stretcher, hobbled over to some armoured cars, placed his stretcher between two of them, lay down, and remarked: " Some bastards'll leave you anywhere." Australians use the word "bastard" so frequently that a Northumberland Fusilier was heard to say: " Funny how these f—— f—— call everybody bastard."

This afternoon I was asked to see Major-General Moreshead, G.O.C. Tobruk. He censors all Press messages himself; prior to the last war he was a schoolmaster; by 1918 he was a Lieutenant-Colonel, D.S.O. He went into the shipping business, and during a business visit to England took a course at a Staff college. Before this war began he was a brigadier in Australia's militia. This is the man who has given orders that no further correspondents shall be permitted for the time being. However, I found him most agreeable; when he heard our car had broken down he offered to find one for us. We talked over what I should do—he thought going up to the front line by moonlight is best, since, if there's no moon, you see very little. There's hardly a front line post he hasn't visited. (I gather he was an infantryman and is devoted to the infantry. He goes round the line saying: " Well, laddie, how's it going? ") He doesn't like this enemy quietness; he used the phrase: " It isn't the party it was." He said the enemy has plenty of tanks and guns, but at present he's using avoiding action—first our patrols have to find him, then a raiding party has to raid him; but in the meantime he may have moved. He withdraws from positions by day and advances into them at night. I asked him if we can hold Tobruk as long as we wish, provided supplies are maintained. He said he never makes prophecies. An American journalist, after being in Tobruk, wrote when he got outside an article bearing the large heading: " You can tell the world we can hold Tobruk . . . says General Moreshead." The General commented to me: " I don't think I ever resented anything more—for I never said it." When I said the enemy quietness may be due to difficulty of supplies, to bad relations between the Germans and Italians, and to his digging in to strengthen his own positions, the General commented: " Sounds too much like wishful thinking to me."

He's been off colour the last day or two—a touch of tonsillitis. He's

had the usual stomach troubles, too, and sandfly fever. On July 1st he was very slightly wounded by shellfire down at the quay—he was on a ship when shelling began and was disinclined to hurry to cover. He's only been known to go to ground twice, though he's been under a good deal of fire. He's the sort of man who, the graver the situation grows, the cooler he becomes. At such times he'll receive a report and read it and then laugh and say: " Just listen to this. This can't be right—we'll wait a bit." All his reports are understatements. He's fifty-two, a real citizen soldier; reads classics and travel when he gets the chance; sleeps on a camp bed in a one-story house; works from about 7.30 a.m. till mid-night or so. Has no fads—likes variety in drinks, smokes a pipe and cigarettes. In the past six months he has only been out of Tobruk twice—each time for a conference. On the last occasion he left he was bombed five times on the way.

We drove down to Tobruk town. From a distance off, when you can't observe how wrecked some of the buildings are, it looks a very pleasant place—the customary white Eastern buildings and so forth. (The Italians have left some admirably-built shelters behind.) Water is so clear that in places you can see unexploded bombs on the sea bed. Marshal Balbo's wrecked aircraft rests there, its wings above the water. For a while our men would swim out to it and dive off the wings. The British destroyer *Ladybird* lies there, a piece of funnel and mast and bridge above the water, the wrecked *Marco Polo* and others. Good tales are recounted of Aussie exploits in swimming—it's said that stuff going ashore by lighters has, from time to time, been shoved overboard and retrieved next day by Aussies, who dive and swim so well.

In a partly-wrecked building sat a young lieutenant who has made it his job to keep record of all the raids—he used to be what he calls a " common or garden clerk," and he has compiled a ledger. He's a remarkable character. I firmly believe he takes pride in these raids and regrets when they don't occur. He said glumly: " We haven't had a decent raid for nearly three weeks." I chaffed him on this and he said, Yes, he feels they are really *his* raids. When a bomb drops close, he says: " That's a good one." (I once met a bomber pilot in Yorkshire back from Kiel who said: " They got so close with the flak to-night that it was tough luck not to get us.") Maybe there's something pathological about this frame of mind, this challenging of death and extinction, but there's no doubt it exists. This Australian lieutenant said he'd be jealous if he had to give up this job and somebody else took it over, though he conceded that probably nobody else would be mad enough to bother to do it. He has recorded 1,707 " reds " since March 2nd. On the busiest day they had twenty-three " reds." The largest number of air-craft used was 141, on September 1st—about fifty of them Stukas (dive-bombers). When the raids are really severe, he goes on the roof to use a machine gun. In his view, Bardia Bill is a 9-inch gun and Salient Sue

an 8-inch. These are enemy guns which shell the harbour. He dislikes shells. His other job is to produce *Tobruk Truth*, a news sheet cyclostyled which gives the radio news (sometimes he adds a cartoon) and of which 600 copies are distributed every day.

We ran into the chief of the workshops, who was trying out a Bren carrier he'd been repairing. He cavorted about the square in this machine, swirling round on its axis, rushing hither and thither in a fashion which, had I been his enemy, would certainly have frightened me. On the way out we passed a street on which was chalked " Sister Street. Try Number 2 "—Sister Street being a notorious street in Alexandria.

September 24th, 1941.

This morning we drove down to visit the Ack-Ack batteries near the harbour, and found the new Colonel to be a director of the *Glasgow Herald* and an official of Glasgow University. He was as well-turned out and as quiet and cheerful as though he'd been at home. The Britisher's capacity for reducing war to the normal and investing it with a sort of homely quality constantly tickles me. He was delighted to tell his assistants that we are really rivals (for a paper which publishes my despatches is printed in Glasgow). He has just taken over—has come from the Suez Canal area, and pronounces Tobruk a rest-cure in its freedom from " paper work." (The paper work in this war, the filling up of forms, etc., far exceeds the last. Most soldiers curse it. Triplicating and quadruplicating are common. If you buy anything at the " officers' shop," the clerk has to shove in three carbons. At the Naafi wholesale shop you give the order to one clerk, the money to a second and a third hands the article over the counter.) The Colonel gave me some interesting figures. The Ack-Ack batteries have destroyed in Tobruk eighty-two enemy aircraft—the heavy batteries have accounted for twenty-four and the light for fifty-eight. In addition, seventy-one enemy aircraft have *probably* been destroyed. Our firing has made life so hot that night raids by the enemy are rising and daylight ones falling. April had only thirty-two enemy aircraft over at night, but August had 205. In August we saw at one time or another, 217 J.U.87s over Tobruk. Dive-bombings were twenty-one in April, seventeen in May, four in July, eleven in August and only one, so far, in September. Last night we had twelve enemy aircraft over; the night before, six. The Colonel said: " We've proved that ' heavies ' can defend themselves against Stukas." He thought the present quietness is resultant on our putting so many Stukas out of action, both in the air and on the ground. In his view, Tobruk has been bombed in this war more than any other place. Speaking of the drain on the German Air Force, he said: " The Germans raiding the Canal area are very tired men—we know that from those we've captured."

A good deal of our Ack-Ack gun material is enemy stuff pieced together by our Ordnance. I asked how the men amuse themselves. He smiled and said: " Well, they become very good swimmers." This was borne out by a battery I visited not far from the water. The men couldn't swim when they arrived, but they are all fine swimmers now. As we sat in the sun and talked, two men played draughts on a home-made draughts board. I was extremely thirsty, and they gave me a cupful of water distilled from sea-water—but it is lifeless, insipid stuff. We've got several distilleries working which can turn out 17,000 gallons in one night. This battery is constructing a deck tennis court near the guns. They've got a dog christened Bofors. Several batteries have called their dog that name, each group thinking they were being original. They said: " The Alsatian yonder chases round the parapet when the guns are firing. Food? Oh, he has what we have." They spoke of fish, and when I asked: " How do you get it? " they replied " Oh, T.N.T." One sergeant had " Bathgate " painted on his helmet. I asked why. He said: " That's where I come from. Other chaps have ' Cissie ' or whatever their girl's name is. When you dash into the gunpit you need to be able to recognise your hat at a glance. Sometimes we've been bathing when the call has gone and we've run into the pits dripping wet and served the guns naked, with only a tin hat on." Occasionally they've bathed four times a day. What they want more than anything else is an accordion to play; they've no music. I watched a rowing-boat going out to the *Ladybird*. A gun-crew of seven work on what's left of her, staying out a week. Some like it—some don't.

These men said they've had seven bottles of beer in six months, and one added: " I've lost the taste for it, though I dare say I'd soon get it back." At another battery, however, where the subject of beer cropped up, one lad said: " *One* gallon a head wouldn't be enough. We could do with two." Their lieutenant said they are so keen that you can't stop them firing—they've a trick of not hearing the order to cease fire. I met a Sheffield man who hurt his left hand, but went on serving the gun, picking up the 56-lb. shells with his right hand. (Formerly he worked for Sheffield Corporation.)

On the subject of being relieved, they grinned and said, pointing to haversacks: " We're all packed ready to go." They keep their irony and satirical sense. I asked a Glasgow paint-mixer how long he'd been in Tobruk. He answered: " Well, we were in that harrier race back here " —meaning the retreat. Others called it " that steeplechase."

Our men take great delight in keeping pets. I was told of a colonel who keeps a white rabbit; the next battery I visited keeps a live sheep known as " Larry the Lamb." Larry was contentedly sitting near the gunpit parapet, looking very clean and well, chewing her cud. A small pile of hay was near her; but she enjoys a bit of bully, too, they said.

She likes being chased about. They've taken her over from their predecessors, who left by ship recently. Larry followed them down to the boat, couldn't accompany them and returned to the gunpits. The shooting doesn't disturb her, they said. Last night this battery fired over a hundred rounds and this morning the gunners were delighted with themselves. The Colonel, who came up, said: "This is an Ack-Ack gunner's paradise. I've been at it since 1916 and never seen such good work done. No red tape here." The Lieutenant said: "If you want a round of ammo in Alex., you have to fill up forms to get it. Here, you just go and take it. It's fine."

September 25th, 1941.

This morning I visited a tanks brigadier, formerly at G.H.Q.—a lively, dashing man, who's pleased to be here. He and his tanks are going to exercise a powerful influence on the next major conflict. It looks as though, at long last, we're to use our tanks in the right fashion. Or some of them. For most of our armoured divisions are still commanded by cavalrymen. There's a lot of nonsense talked about the "cavalry spirit." "Ah!" say the War Office Brass Hats. "It's true they know nothing about tanks, but they still have the cavalry spirit." A general who planned to attack from the front at Sollum said to his critics: "What we want is simplicity and again, simplicity." Meanwhile, young tank commanders who know the job backwards are champing the bit. Constantly people say to me: "Ah! But it'll be different after this war." Will it? There'll have to be some hard fighting done before it is. Two officers on G.H.Q. have said to me at different times that they've founded a "Hanging from Lamp-posts Society." They say it sardonically; there's a good deal of feeling behind their words.

To-night Captain O. and I set off for the front line. After half a mile over the rocky escarpment our driver found he could twist the wheel right round without the steering being affected. O., not easily perturbed, said: "Well, go on a bit farther—see what happens." I must say I took a poor view of this. But after 50 more yards, we had to stop. The left front wheel was going straight, but the right wheel was heading due right. We abandoned the car to the driver, and walked to a handful of tents a mile away. Here we were lucky enough to persuade a truck driver to take us on to Brigade H.Q. This truck had no left door. I sat on the left, hanging on to a cylinder, and O. sat perched high in the middle on a lump of metal. We arrived, but couldn't find Brigade. It was now dark. After some time making inquiries (we found a Pole playing an accordion), a Tynesider took us to an advanced dressing station. Here we telephoned Brigade, who promised to send a truck for us. (They had expected us last night—nobody knew we were coming to-night. Some

blunder in sending messages.) We were conducted to the Officers' Mess and found two doctors, who invited us to join them in rum and water—which we did. They were sitting in a large cave in the hillside, back to prehistory. We stayed an hour here and then were summoned to the truck. We clambered down over the boulders, the orderly kindly giving me a hand, for it would have been difficult enough in daylight. (One doctor's people are in Jersey ? Had we any news of it ? We hadn't, but O.'s people are in Guernsey, where his sister has recently got married. This suggests the situation there is not too bad.)

The young Australian truck-driver said: " I'll have to be a bit careful going back—I got into the minefield coming down—ten yards in. Didn't know where I was for a minute." The three of us sat in front. The driver hung out of the right-hand window to pierce the dark, and I hung from time to time out of the left, but I wasn't much use, for I didn't know the way—all I could see were occasional wheel-marks in the sand. We staggered along, twisting about, with your humble servant hoping we were missing the minefield. Occasionally the driver would say: "I think we're all right." Then we turned left up a *wadi*. This *wadi* was a rocky gorge in the hillside. Whenever one caught a glimpse of the track, it looked mighty dangerous and impassable. It rose and fell in vicious little rocky ascents and declines, turned this way and that, was strewn with boulders, had a gorge on the right in various places, and altogether suited a truck about as well as I suit Mount Everest. We bumped and slid and heeled over like a yacht, till at times, from the very absurdity of this journey, we cracked out laughing. I don't know how we made it, but we made it. This brought us to Battalion H.Q. We saw enormous boulders and crags and chinks of gold light in between the rocks and a vertical ladder (half a builder's ladder) going down. Down we went and found ourselves in caves rigged with wood and canvas, one table a yard higher than another, a telephone perched on rock; petrol tins and boxes were articles of luxury. The Adjutant said he was " flat out " for guides, but finally raked up a signaller. He said we should be all right if we were clear of the front line by 11.30 p.m.—that a *strafe* usually began then, when working parties on both sides had come in. " It's a pretty friendly war," he said with a dry smile. " Quite impersonal. There's a sort of agreement we don't shell as the rations go up. And Jerry plays the game over the Red Cross, too. We can send out two men and a stretcher and he doesn't fire—but the stretcher must be folded. If you send three men or if the stretcher isn't folded, he fires. We do the same by him, of course. You have to watch him. One day he brought up an ambulance and some very fit-looking men emerged. We fired—just to remind him." He told me something else—that two of our posts confront one another and are rather close. So we don't fire straight ahead, nor do they—we each fire on posts to the flank.

I find this very interesting. I remember standing in trenches near the

La Bassée road in 1915 hearing our ration limbers rattling up that road to Annequin Corner; they didn't shell ours and we didn't shell theirs. The principle—troops must eat. So it is here in Tobruk Salient. There were times when the troops facing us in the old war would shout: "Better look out—the Prussians are relieving us." The Bavarians and Saxons appeared not to like the Prussians much better than we did. It's obvious that some of Hitler's men will observe the decencies when he will not. But how does this live and let live square with ruthless war?

The signaller took us on towards the front, running his hand along a wire to find the way. After half a mile we remembered we didn't know the password. However, we would get it from the first lot we met. Presently a couple went by on our right, fifty yards off in the dark, chattering like magpies. I tried to distinguish English words, but couldn't. Soon afterwards, a couple came towards us dead on. Our, signaller, a lad in his twenties, got down on one knee, levelled his rifle, halted them and asked for the password. "How the f—— hell do I know?" replied a voice cheerfully. We laughed. We were in turn asked for the password, and couldn't supply it. We passed and went on. The next two we halted were punctilious—an anti-tank officer and sergeant. They said who they were and gave the password at once. We hoped it was the right one. The officer had a Tommy-gun. He was so precise I wondered if he were German. However. . . . Once in a while a star shell rose ahead or right or left and we either dropped on a knee or stood stock still. Then on again. No shots were being fired on either side. We reached Company H.Q. and climbed down another ladder, to find ourselves in a very large underground cave about 20 yards square, a trifle smoke-hung, uneven, with groups here and there, some working at tables, some resting and lounging. Here we found the Colonel, a lean man of forty-odd, smoking a pipe (he turned out to be a director of the *Melbourne Argus*). His view was that the front would in all likelihood be quiet till the early hours, and approved our going on to another company to see some dug-in posts. He hoped we shouldn't run into a *Blitz*—and off we went again, still trailing our wire. We crossed a low ridge, climbed a wall and finally found ourselves going down yet another ladder into a concrete post—somewhat damp and unhealthy, at the bottom of which we moved along a passage to find the company commander, a young lieutenant, wrestling with his paper war—filling up forms detailing what ammunition he possessed. He has twelve different sorts of machine-guns, including Fiat, Spandau, Brada, Schwarzloso, two anti-tank rifles, including a Zolothern, and others also. These returns he has to make are the devil. He said: "Jerry is bloody cunning. When we attack, he withdraws. Then when we get into his positions he shells us to hell. He shells his own men too—absolutely ruthless—leaves a section or two of machine-gunners to hold us up and then shells the lot of us, wipes his

men out along with us." Um. But, in fact, this company has only had one man killed in a fortnight. He thought the troops in front are not German, but Italian, judging by the amount of tracer bullet they use and the way we've quelled them from firing. They got so much " wind up " the other night that their barrage put up twenty-seven of our mines. So we have to lay them again.

He fastened on his equipment and accompanied me to show me the dug-in post. I found all this journey thrilling and remindful of old days. He walked briskly and we followed in Indian file. We came to two or three stretchers lying on the ground, but they held not men but small black objects which were mines—about the size of a large panlid. Men stood about—others lay down, resting. These were engineers, laying the mines. The lieutenant said that mines not laid must be taken away again, not left exposed. After some hundreds of yards, we came on the trench—remarkable in that it was 5 feet deep—about the only piece hereabouts which is. I got in to test its depth and width. It was narrow, sandy, dry—much narrower than Western Front trenches and a much more temporary affair. A few cubby holes were dug in the face wherein a man could crawl and sleep; these holes held some tinned foods and cigarettes. The night remained quiet—no shots whatever as yet. The lieutenant said that in the more shallow trenches—hardly worth the name of trenches at all—he had lain on his back for twelve hours. " It's very weakening—like lying in bed. We get a few days back in support and then in somewhere else." He was very tired. When I said I felt sure they'd get some relief soon (from knowledge I possessed), he said: " It sounds like a fable to me."

We retraced our steps, chatting, and hadn't gone far when suddenly tracer bullets, brilliant red in the night, began to cut past 10 or 15 yards on our left. They were flying high—about 10 feet or more, quite a stream of them. He paused, turned, watched them for a moment and then resumed his walk and talk with me without making any comment. They might have been a flight of birds for all the danger he appeared to see in them. How far this was due to his tiredness, I don't know. But exhaustion has that effect on me. I recall saying to a companion as we came out of a " show " on the Somme in 1916: " What's the matter with you? Why hurry? Are you afraid of the shells or something? "—as if being afraid of shells was the lowest depth. It was merely that I was too tired to care; and he was less tired than I was and more frightened in consequence.

Having parted from the Lieutenant, whenever the machine guns began to fire and bullets came past, we lay down. This happened half a dozen times. We caught up with a Captain of Australian engineers, unsure of his way. The direction was: " Go fifteen paces to the right of the tape and there you'll find the wire." But it didn't work out. He told me about laying and unearthing mines. One of his jobs is clearing

German minefields. I asked how it's done. He said: " Only one way—get down on your hands and knees and run your fingers through the sand looking for 'em. Last night one of our chaps knelt on one—blew his face off, and part of his foot; instantaneous." Instantaneous death, he meant.

I've omitted to record that the Adjutant also said that before Jerry begins his *strafes* he fires three rounds of tracer bullet—a signal. We take the signal and go to ground. Of course, it may be a signal to his own men to be ready for what's coming. The Adjutant got out of bed to welcome us back at B.H.Q.—I find the Aussies both kindly and courteous—and then we scrambled over the rocky gorge to find the truck that was to take us home. The lad was asleep, and it looked a shame to wake him. But he got up, lit a cigarette and coughed over it. Another truck was filled with engineers who'd been searching for mines—they were going back to sleep. " We're lucky," they said. " We get back out of it when we've finished." One remarked, after somebody had said they would be relieved from Tobruk before long: " I'd like to have seen it through and gone out by road. We've been here from the jump."

Some of our English lads who came into Tobruk to-night had been in Egypt only three days. They got on the warships and asked where they were bound for. Tobruk? " Cripes! " they said. They had one bomb dropped near them—" Four o'clock Jimmy " they call it.

September 26th, 1941.

I remain very thirsty. Visitors to Tobruk find themselves during the first two days very thirsty indeed. After that, it appears to wear off a bit. This morning I have nine bites on my forehead—considerable bumps. I find I smoke a good deal. The Adjutant said last night: " I've smoked a hundred this week and then fifty and then my ' iron ration.' " I had only two and a half hours' sleep last night, but it was heavy, sound sleep, and I feel pretty well.

An officer of our county yeomanry who passed through our camp to-day said that at Keren (Abyssinia) they had 120 shells within their gun position in one hour. " But our chaps were fine. I'd been anxious how they would turn out. They laughed like hell over it afterwards. We'd only one man wounded. But I was never so sorry for men as for the infantry that day—it was a hell-hole for them."

Lieut. Vanderson, the photographer, lived for a while in Sollum (now in enemy hands). " Down Hell Fire Pass you've got to limp with all your brakes on and in bottom gear. It's suicide if your car isn't O.K."

This afternoon I visited the Australian Hospital in Tobruk—I wished to see a padre who knew the facts concerning the Germans helping us

with a truck to gather our wounded. I was asked to have tea and sat next the Colonel commanding—a giant of a man, sixty-odd I should say. He spoke so quietly I had to ask him to repeat half his remarks. This morning eleven were killed and twenty wounded by an unlucky bomb that dropped near an Ack-Ack battery. The Colonel said: " It's either a rush or nothing here." Of days in the week he said: " I know Thursday because that day we get a cigarette issue and I know Sunday because the padres are in different uniform. That's all." I said I missed music. He said, chuckling. " We brought a pianola from Melbourne labelled ' X-ray equipment.' It's the best thing we've got."

The padre had a youngish face, but white hair. He said it was not he, but Father Thomas Gard, who took out the truck for wounded. Father Gard had told him the facts, which were these: There had been a minor battle in the salient. Father Gard waited at the Advanced Dressing Station for our wounded to come down. They didn't arrive, so just before dawn he painted a Red Cross on a truck and went up and out into no-man's-land seeking the wounded. As he was doing this a voice called out: " Attention ! There are mines there. Stand where you are ! " He didn't see the shouter, but stood still. A German sapper came out and " deloused " some mines (rendered them safe). The padre was invited to go to the German post, which he did. The German officer then became angry, saying: " At this moment your artillery are shelling our dressing post. I give you a minute to get out." The padre replied that a minute was of no use to him, and he'd no intention of getting out (or words to that effect). During the talk which followed, better relations were established, for the German officer afterwards sent men to assist Father Gard to gather our wounded up, and the Germans also gave them medical attention. Father Gard is reported to have said that the only shortcoming on the German side was to keep our wounded men warm enough and when he pointed this out, they remedied it by placing coats over them.

(I was told from another source that one of our wounded men preferred to remain a prisoner because his brother had been captured earlier that day.)

There was another occasion when one of our men was seriously wounded in a forward post. His companion got a sheet of white paper, daubed a Red Cross on it with the man's blood, held it up, raised the man and carried him on his shoulder to a place further back. The enemy didn't fire; but, later, heavily bombarded the post, of whose whereabouts they had either not previously known or been uncertain of.

The padre who informed me of Father Gard's experience used Tobruk Church for his services from April 13th to July 27th. His worshippers stopped gaps and polished the marble till the church looked quite presentable. The church was dive-bombed during the service on July 6th, but the congregation never moved; at the height of that *Blitz* he admin-

istered Holy Communion to about 200 people. On July 27th the church was dive-bombed again, and is now unfit for use. He has rescued a pretty statue of the Virgin Mother (or an angel—I'm not sure which), and this is intact in his room.

Speaking of the Italians, I said they appear to have all the qualities which make men good citizens in times of peace and the fact that they don't face bayonets well does not diminish them much in my estimation. He said there are still twelve Italians working as orderlies in the hospital. I asked: " How do they like being here ? " He replied: " They love being here. There's nothing they will not do. You should see the rings and beer mugs they've made for the Australians from shell-cases and from a Stuka propeller which weighed 3 cwt. And you should see what they can do with a tin of bully and a few onions ! Delicious ! " Speaking of the dive-bombing by Stukas, he said: " It's an awe-inspiring sight. They come right down, absolutely vertical. You'd think the Ack-Ack was confetti." (Either he or somebody else told me that they'd seen the Jerries obviously forcing the Italians down in the dives, the Jerries flying behind the Italians. The Italians' dive is at an angle of about 45 degrees, and they pull out of it far sooner than Jerry does.)

It's interesting to see how skin bared to the sun grows a good deal of hair. The South Africans' legs and arms are covered with fine light-coloured hair. The medical Colonel confirmed that—said hair grows abundantly and the skin gets hard. On the question of losing weight, he said one or two of his doctors have lost as much as 3 stones, but they are none the worse for it. (I have lost about half a stone.)

The padre said: " You ought to see the war cemetery. Some of the men have got hold of a bit of marble or stone and polished it and carved on it their pal's name and stuck it up. Usually the stone bears no more than his name and number, but on three I've seen added: " A dinkum Aussie." He went on: " Not long ago two Australians made a compact with one another that if one were killed, the other would sound the Last Post over him. Well, one was killed and the other wounded—wounded badly enough to be sent to Alex. But before he went he managed, somehow or other, to scrounge an old Italian bugle. I saw him sitting in the ward polishing it up till it shone. Then he got somebody to motor him out to the cemetery and he hobbled over to the grave and managed to prop himself up while he blew the Last Post."

There were thirty graves in that cemetery when the padre first saw it. There are 758 now.

September 27th, 1941.

I was roused in the night by rain drumming on my tin roof. This was astonishing. Clouds darkened the sky before breakfast and it began to pour again—quite heavily, so that soon, pools dotted the sand and stones,

and rain began to dribble and then stream through the roof on to the centre breakfast table. Our huts are not built for rain. I stood at the door watching a figure ploughing through it—5 yards from the hut he skidded on his feet and fell full length. " Christ ! " he said. " It's like ice." Another Australian voice called: " Say, I think it's going to rain." Our little dog ran under my bed, as scared of rain as he is of bombs. This is the first rain since April. But inside an hour we'd blue skies again. It was wet while it lasted.

Last night I sat drinking small glasses of water, savouring it as though it were wine.

There's no doubt that the enemy is having difficulty in maintaining his supplies and that small pockets of Germans are being used to stiffen the Italians. The Italian prisoners complain that German M.T. drivers constantly cut in and overtake Italian drivers, claiming the right to go first everywhere. An Italian officer told us how he picked up a tube outside his tent exactly resembling a toothpaste tube; it exploded, taking off three fingers. (The Germans have dropped a fair number of these booby traps in our territory. They did this in Belgium also, fifteen months ago.) Italian rations grow worse—coffee and sugar are diminished. The 1939–40 stocks of tinned meat are exhausted and the new supplies contain less meat and more liquid. For the past ten days they have had no wine whatever. (All this from prisoners taken by us.) Some of the Italian prisoners are peasants unable to read or write and all except one appear to be glad to be captured. A number of them assert that friction exists between the Fascists and the Regular Army and that political officers at headquarters often criticise superior military officers. They assert that the whole population of Benghazi is taken out of the town each night by motor lorries. Allowing for exaggeration, there's encouraging news in this. A young Australian infantry officer who's been six months in Tobruk said to me that they've been surprised more than once by the poor morale of the Germans once the Australians get amongst them. He added: " One or two German officers said they didn't want to fight this war, but, being of military families, had no option." On the other hand, he had met German prisoners who looked at Tobruk and said: " It'll soon be ours."

I drove out to look at the western sector of the perimeter, passing the remains of a Hurricane with a wooden cross beside it. Evidence of past fighting lies about—a good deal of Italian broken equipment, water bottles, gas-maks, broken bayonets, mess tins, etc. A curious point—we are frequently firing much the same shells at each other (theirs). I had been told that the scenery hereabouts was grand, but such grandeur as it possesses is merely that of rounded stone hills and valleys, with the sea alongside. We've erected a number of lookout posts (so has the enemy) —rough poles with rungs to climb by and a small orange-box contraption on top for the lookout man. They're 25 or 30 feet high, but one is

twice that height. The enemy (Italians) are a mile off, but they withdraw at night so that our patrols often go 7,000 yards deep without encountering them; one patrol went 12,000 yards deep and was away two days. A short while back, when the enemy attacked a post of ours held by seven men, the enemy used five tanks (previously captured from us) and two companies of men. They overran this post, as well they might. Round about that time they were nervously firing 1,500 shells a day at us, but now the number has dwindled again to about 300. They usually shell up to 9 a.m. and again at dusk. We've chopped a number of telephone-poles down to prevent their ranging.

As we drove along we passed a number of old Italian guns that looked as though they might have been used in the Peninsular War—somebody says they were captured from the Austrians in 1912. Another I see is an Italian double-barrelled field gun—a field gun on the fowling-piece principle. Heaven knows how successful this notion is. We've captured so many machine guns from the enemy that it is almost a problem to find men to use them—over a hundred automatic weapons in this battalion. (In 1915 my battalion had eight.) The barbed wire on the far side of the *wadi* looked like a railway line in its width and regularity. Company H.Q. was inside a concrete post—we climbed down a ladder of some fifteen or twenty rungs. The Captain sat at the far end among pay-books and letters for censorship, shouting cheerfully and noisily to us. He called for water and we shared the last of a bottle of gin—the first gin I've had this week (and the only gin). He joked about British regiments called the "Queens" and "Kings"—said they were a regular royal party. Another captain sat on some stone steps with me and told me of a daylight patrol he went on—in which he lost a wallet holding £7 and stamps and whatnot. "If an honest man finds it, I guess he'll take the seven quid and send me the rest," he said drily. He went on: "If you get within four hundred yards of their posts, they give you the works—and stones this big run about like marbles. I'll tell you the Ities bring down their artillery quicker than we do—seems to be under the command of the forward people. His strong posts have about seven machine guns apiece, too. You can certainly stir up as much trouble as you like." In this bit of valley we are using Italian phones and switchboard.

The Liaison Officer who has been journeying with us saw an Australian leather jerkin we had with us. It is a jerkin polished to the colour of a fine mahogany "conker." He said: "When the Australians wore them at Bardia the Italians thought, from their colour, that the Aussies were wearing armour, so they fired at the Aussies' legs. We certainly had a lot of men wounded in the legs." He was in the salient here. He said: "In May when I was there, for a period of about ten days, you could walk about in broad daylight two or three hundred yards from the enemy,

and they didn't fire at you." I asked how we discovered that. He said: " In my own case, I had left my Primus stove in company headquarters and I badly wanted a cup of tea. I said: ' Hell! I'm going back for it,' and got out and walked back in the middle of the afternoon. Then, maybe Jerry decided we were overdoing it, and he began firing at us."

I hear of a man drinking a cocktail compounded of petrol and milk ! And a man catching fish with gelignite—the gelignite makes bubbles as it descends, the bubbles attract the fish, the gelignite explodes and, hey presto ! fish for tea.

September 28th, 1941.

Near our *wadi* are an open-air shed and a few stoves. On inquiring what their purpose is, I was told a cookery school, sometimes held for a fortnight at a time. " You can cook bully-beef twenty-seven different ways," said my friend. For myself, I think bully is best really cold, with pickles or sauce. However . . . We sought the cookery expert—a youngish man with sandy hair, a captain, who took us into his dugout and gave us a cup of Italian sparkling water, the same brand I've had before. There's precious little of it left now, but in the beginning there were scores of thousands of bottles—our men made tea with it, and even washed their feet in it. What would they not give for that wasted water now ! The cookery expert said it was true about the manifold ways of treating bully—one way, for instance, was to cut it into pieces, add boiled rice, crushed Army biscuits, a little flour, a little oatmeal, sprinkle with curry, make it into flat rissoles and fry in $\frac{1}{2}$ an inch of fat. He told us how to make a bacon puff-pastry roll, how to fashion a galantine of bully with nine tins of bully, two of bacon, $4\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of biscuits, some stock, herbs, pickles and seasoning; put all through the mincer, roll with pickles in the centre, boil two hours and then press. (I trust I have this correct.) He had recipes for biscuit doughnuts, for a plain pudding from 16 lb. biscuits, 4 lb. fat, 1 oz. salt, and water.

There's no doubt an able cook could work miracles with the Army rations. Each man in Tobruk now receives about 3 lb. 2 oz. of food a day; certainly at my camp we have fed well. The first morning for breakfast we had steak and onions. The General asked me not to say that, because it might mislead people—fresh meat is much rarer than that breakfast sounds. But every morning I have had porridge and, usually, tinned bacon. Onions have been plentiful. One morning we had small round grey-yellow objects on the table—limes, it seems. The men like to squeeze a lime or two into their water bottle. Lime-juice powder is issued; at all events, it improves the water.

I don't know if the Army issues a pamphlet setting out the various recipes for bully and so forth; it would be worth doing. By the way,

we've got 28 tons of garlic flour in Tobruk; and no use for it. A teaspoonful is strong enough to flavour a mountain. I'm assured the salty water is excellent with coffee. I haven't tried it. The water certainly lends " body " to the tea. Of the two, tea made with lifeless distilled water or with the salty water, I prefer the salt. No doubt it's good medicinally, too.

I spent the remainder of the day with the Northumberland Fusiliers, who've been in the desert over a year: they set out on a three-days' exercise in September, 1940—and they're still doing it. The Colonel laughed over that; both his trouser-legs are patched, for they set off with little kit. During this time they've lost about 200 men, but fifty are now back, recovered from wounds. " Round my last office, dropped a score or two of bombs. One 600-lb. bomb hit my truck—the truck disappeared, but only one man was hurt; two others lying with the protection of a few sandbags escaped altogether." (I hear a saying: " Lie down in the desert, turn about three times and you're dug in a few inches and nothing but a direct hit'll do you much harm.") The C.O. said that boredom and discomfort during the summer were the worst enemies, but the men have stuck it very well. " We've had a camp by the sea to which the men have gone for three days at a time." This regiment went to Benghazi and came back into Tobruk. They wear trousers as distinct from shorts, partly so that they are easily distinguished and partly because the red-hot cartridge cases from their machine-guns have a trick of shooting into shorts, with uncomfortable results. I visited some of the gun positions and met a young second-lieutenant who was a research history scholar at Oxford (got a First there). His father's a North-Country vicar and he himself was going into the Church—a tall, brawny lad with fine grey eyes and hair on the cheek-bones. He took me down into the gun-posts—we slid down a narrow hole and crawled along a trench; into the gunpit comes a pipe-end—a drain pipe, which has become a speaking tube; excellent, too. They've got a dining-room underground, also. They're lucky altogether at this post. The men were quite chirpy—several hail from Hull, others from Newcastle-on-Tyne and neighbourhood. Among their badinage was:

" If our password is ' boat ' again, I'll dot somebody one. . . ."

" Mussolini is the best quarter-bloke we ever had. . . ."

" You ought to try our bully. It's like chicken—it is, straight. . . ."

" We're just waiting for Jerry to come over. . . ."

" At night we tell fortunes by cards—we're always going out on the 20th. . . ."

Their spirits were fine, but they don't compare with the Australians for good teeth and physique. One lad had a wide gap in his teeth at the front.

A cricket match was going on nearby—against the Australians. We

had provided two bats (previously given by another batch of Aussies) and the Aussies found the ball. It was the sort of cricket played on brick crofts—rough pitch, no grass, and the ball had to be clouted in the air to get runs. The Aussies had made eighty-seven, we hit up about forty, and they put the Northumberlands in again. As I watched, an enemy aircraft was seen and the waiting batsmen were told to take cover; but the match didn't stop and the aircraft didn't trouble us. The Second-Lieutenant said: " I was doing a thesis at Oxford on a seventeenth-century chap—doesn't seem so important now." I said that if he went into the Church after the war he'd find all this useful in meeting the men on level terms. Yes, he said, he knew that—that was partly why he's here.

I was introduced to Fusilier Walter Williams of Sunderland, a blue-eyed, fair-haired chap of twenty-four who's had a great adventure—walked about 600 miles from the other side of Benghazi to the neighbourhood of Siwa; he was on tramp from April 3rd to June 23rd. On April 3rd it looked as though he and some nine others—about half a dozen from a Rifle regiment—would be captured. He evaded that, and now he's back on his Bren gun. He has no gift of speech and words come reluctantly—sometimes there's a far-off look in his eyes; how much is boredom with telling his story and how much thoughtfulness it's hard to tell. It's impossible to put the story in his words except for an odd phrase, such as that he was " glad to be shut of a mirror " once he'd looked at his bearded face. Soon after the adventure began, thy bought a goat for 25 piastres—but it was a little goat—they polished it off in one meal. As days went by, the nine dwindled (maybe some were captured or gave themselves up because of exhaustion), till only Williams and a pal were left. I think it was Williams, this almost wordless man, who was the more indomitable. Once or twice, he said, they were lucky for food, because they came on Bedouin who were holding a funeral—and when they have a funeral they kill about a dozen sheep. But sometimes they went hungry, and once were three days without water, sucking a pebble or two. I asked if he got any fun out of it all. He said, well, once when Jerry was bombing, the Arabs came running out of their tents shouting and praying—" We had to laugh." By the time the trek was ended, his pal had two odd boots, one size twelve and one size seven; Williams was carrying his own boots in his hands. They had Bedouin headdress and Italian greatcoats; they'd but one Italian blanket between them and on many days they got only two hours' sleep a day—it was either too hot or too cold and there was the need to keep moving. Near Derna they stayed five weeks, occasionally getting a job chopping wood to earn some food. Twice they borrowed a razor and shaved—but it was a tough job, for they'd no soap or lather. " I could feel myself getting thinner," he said. They had a water bottle which they filled at wells, and the Arabs were good to them (he can speak a little Arabic,

having been out here three years). On one occasion they were approaching an Arab tent for food when an Italian officer issued forth and drew his automatic. But they ran and he didn't fire. Once or twice they saw Jerries, too. But their adventures of that sort were small. On June 23rd they were sitting in an Arab encampment when a man rode up on a horse and handed them a note which read, in English: "Follow this man to safety." They followed him—fifteen further miles across the desert, and there came on a British Intelligence Officer. "Before that," he said, "I'd given away my last pound note for two Players cigarettes."

September 29th, 1941.

I left Tobruk last night and am back in Cairo. A couple of hours before departure we had a little dive-bombing near our *wadi*, and two huts were damaged; nobody hurt. As always, it was rather a charged atmosphere waiting at the harbour, knowing we are well within shell-range. But no shells came over. (I wonder why? Shell shortage? One knows these long-range guns soon wear their barrels out, too.) I wandered along the harbour-side and came on two Australians lying on a ledge waiting to note where mines drop in the harbour, should the enemy lay them. Men waiting to go aboard lay on the quayside resting. Dead on time the ships came. A young naval officer helped me with my gear down to the ward-room. The ship's doctor asked us to have a whisky and soda. He might have been in a London club. What a fellowship this is to be a member of! An Australian officer came along later and asked two of us if we'd take a drink with him. After we had talked a while, he turned and said: "But you've no accent." I laughed and said that on the contrary I have a Lancashire accent. "Ah!" he said. "But you talk like us; you haven't that—that *English* accent. We can't always understand it."

Nobody could be in Tobruk without forming a high opinion of the Australians; kindly, warm-hearted, courteous and a real pleasure to be with. I found them easier to get on with than some of our own people, for they're less fussy, more direct, more simple, more democratic. Occasionally I run across something in our red-tabbed Staff officers and generals that is obnoxious to me—a mixed stupidity and arrogance. Cairo is strewn with it.

A Major of artillery told me on the ship how he has spent the past six months or so. He waited for three months in England to make the journey out, took two months on the way, worked one month in Tobruk (during which he didn't fire a shot) and has waited three weeks to leave Tobruk. But, after all, this is typical of war. War is mostly waste.

The ship's ward-room was turned into a dormitory for us. Some kind soul brought along about a dozen camp-beds and a blanket per bed. On

these, most of us slept soundly in our clothes. By the time I woke, the enemy had dropped a solitary bomb at sea, which exploded a mile off.

I am reminded that a fortnight ago a senior R.A.F. officer told me that some of our pilots in the desert are flying over the sea short of Mae Wests and the right goggles. And we've been at war over two years.

A wit in Tobruk has written an account of how we may capture the enemy and make Tobruk an enviable resort; first you import rabbits, which breed to the tune that rabbit pies and stews are daily feasts; next, that their furs so attract the ladies that pretty girls come in hundreds to make life a paradise; lastly, that the enemy, seeing the girls, gladly surrender.

October 3rd, 1941.

My valise, which I left behind at Durban at the end of July, has not yet arrived. A Bulgarian friend is aghast at my trustfulness; says her English husband is just the same—he trusts everybody; she trusts nobody. When she travels, she keeps close beside her her bag with passport and so on. " England is only place in Europe where I travel and people are honest and frank. They are not polite—they take no notice of you. But I like that. In Italy everybody help you—everybody on train do this and that for you and want to know you. But I not want know everybody. And everywhere in Europe where a woman go the men—eyes zis way and zat—no peace for a woman. But in England they take no notice—zat is aw right." I said that I begin to be disgusted by the Egyptians' twisting over money. Even golf-caddies argue—say the money you give them is bad. The waiter on the train gives you a wrong sum—adds a piastre to the bill. If your taxi waits for you to make a call, the driver will stop his clock and at the journey's end ask some fantastic price, being sure there's no clock to check. She agreed, adding that in the market there *is* no price—tomatoes will range from 1 piastre to 6 for the same quantity. But she is an enthusiast for England. " England is quite different from everywhere else—everybody honest." Well, that's far from so; but it's good to hear her view.

She wants to know when we are going to use some really up-to-date methods to win this war. " So fars I see we fight it same last time. That no use. Why not put over somesing send them to sleep—then just go over capture zem all. One hour—two hour enough—not harm them—just zend them to sleep. Or perhaps it better we kill off the leaders—Hitler and the ozers. Why not do it? Zurely we are clever enough. People who've lost all zeir families—why don't they do it? Nozing to lose for them. Hitler must have private life—somebody know where he

go—what he do. I don't understand why not do it." (She understands five languages.)

October 4th, 1941.

I ran into the Captain of the Scots Guards with whom I spent a night in his outposts. I asked after the regiment. He said: " John Bowes-Lyon has gone." I didn't grasp for a moment what he meant, but he then added Bowes-Lyon went out on patrol and didn't return. I asked might he not be a prisoner, but he didn't think so.

John Patrick Bowes-Lyon is the Queen's nephew. I did not meet him. It appears his patrol came under very heavy fire and they had to retreat into the sea to escape the fire. It was night. He has not been seen since.

I heard this on the edge of the cricket field at Gezira. The Royal Artillery were playing Gezira Club. We sat afterwards having tea and watching the cricket. My Brigadier friend said he wondered what the Germans in the Western Desert were doing—he supposed doing tactical exercises. Another of our group thought it fine the way we English can enjoy ourselves in the middle of war. I, thinking about Bowes-Lyon and feeling disgruntled, said a little cricket was all right, but about half the officers here would be better employed learning their job. Somebody said: " But we always come out all right." I said: " I don't know—we make the most grievous blunders."

We had some discussion about the way good men are taken from their regiments and sent to Staff colleges. " That's all right," said the senior officer, " but too often the regiment never sees them again. So that to find an outstanding squadron-leader still with his regiment is rare. That's all wrong. A man cannot jump from being Staff officer to commanding a brigade, or jump efficiently. He needs to have experience in commanding a regiment first. And too often they don't get it. To take all the outstanding men from a regiment on to the Staff is unwise. We're too apt to do it."

The G.O.C.-in-C., Middle East, General Sir Claude Auchinleck, has been commenting in *Parade*, a picture paper, on a German's diary captured after the last battle of Sollum. The General comments once or twice that the Germans undoubtedly have guts. " These chaps have got guts [he writes] and they know their job. We have guts too, and we must know our job better than they do." He says: " We have the bulge over them so far as our supply arrangements are concerned." Again: " They are tough and worth beating, these Germans." Finally: " I hope we will have him under the sand or in the bag before long."

This is hardly the language of a Cæsar or a Napoleon. However, language doesn't win battles.

October 7th, 1941.

A Greek was asked by a German who would win the war. The Greek replied that he really couldn't say. The German persisted, whereupon the Greek then answered: "Really, how should one know? But when I meet British people, *they* never ask me who will win the war."

To-day I came to Ismailia by road on the way to Jerusalem. Stayed the night in the United Services Club overlooking the small lake into which the Suez Canal runs. No mosquito net and fiercely bitten by them —forehead covered with red blotches; hands, legs and neck all affected. *The Times Literary Supplement* in the Club has a notice of *Towards the Morning*, saying I am tilting at windmills in suggesting that all the clerks and administrators of Whitehall should get out of uniform into plain clothes. They avoid reference to my attack on Woolton for allowing the well-to-do among us to buy in hotels and restaurants all the food we can eat. They find a note of asperity in the book; I should trust so.

We drove for some distance along the Sweet Water Canal. Never saw such patched sails, spendthrifts with whatever light wind blows. During one halt, a fine bit of seamanship was performed before us. This barge had a cross sail that towered to a point 70 feet high. Up the mast and to the top of this bending sail climbed an Arab sailor to furl it, while a mate perched himself, legs twined, round the bottom-most end as counterweight. I suppose these watermen earn by skilled and laborious work no more in a day than an Egyptian waiter at the Gezira Club receives in tips for serving two rounds of drinks. To eke out the wind, the barge is pulled along by a man on the bank, a rope round his chest, body bent forward, feet picking a way along rough ground, skirting boulders and the rest—horse work. One barge was drawn by a boy of twelve or so.

My companion sailed out to Africa last winter. It was a week when our sea losses were heavy; the ship on each side of his was torpedoed one night in bitterly cold water. He was roused by the engines stopping, heard shouting and running, and bumping alongside; thought they had hit a mine. Got up, grabbed warm clothing, left his cabin, then—and this is queer—paused, returned and seized a handful of loose small change from his dressing-table. "I can't tell you why I did that," he said. "Quite stupid, really—I suppose some long-formed habit." He had difficulty in believing this dreadful adventure was happening to him—it was for him akin to watching something on a stage. The cries for help from the water were hard to bear—they went on during the half-hour the ship was stationary and they recurred in his head for forty-eight hours. "We hadn't been hit, and during the time we were stopped, I was fearful we should be. I was more frightened for those we

picked up—seventeen—than for myself. I thought: 'Won't it be awful if these poor devils are torpedoed again after being rescued?' But once the ship became to move, I felt we were safe. No reason for that feeling, but I had it." Some passengers were jumpy afterwards: one man couldn't settle down to read—all he could do was play cards; wouldn't go to bed till after midnight, so my companion played cards with him every night till a late hour. The man slept in his clothes. I asked: " Did you feel, after those ships were lost, that their loss was planned by Fate, that a design was in it." He said: " No. Quite the contrary."

I was prompted to ask, because yesterday an aircraft of ours carrying a general and two brigadiers crashed soon after taking off and the passengers were killed. Those men had jobs that were (one would have said) as safe as any jobs can be while war lasts. This aircraft journey was in the nature of a civil flight. And then this. Design, plan, malicious Fate (this fight of ours, which I believe to be righteous, could ill spare them) or pure chance as ungoverned as a sparrow's flight? What does one say?

October 8th, 1941.

To-night I came to Jerusalem. It was dusk when we got here. Both our headquarters and my pension are in the German colony, the pension kept by Germans—the waitress blonde, with thick legs. First impressions of the city are strange: it might have been the outskirts of an English country town, well-kept, spacious, prosperous; grey stone walls, gardens with trees. For supper—thin pork with *Sauerkraut*. K. looked in to see me —he's running foreign broadcasts; found on arrival departments scattered in eight offices, which better organisation has now got under one roof. One department costing £800 a month has been closed down altogether—served no good purpose. We had a hundred people here doing nothing and costing a fabulous sum.

One of the more remarkable sights on the way to Jerusalem was that of flocks grazing on what appeared to be bare arid earth. No vestige of green, nothing visible for them to eat—as though they grazed in a claypit. Camels and a few donkeys as well as sheep were nosing in the earth. Some time later I saw that some of this arid earth bore a thin, wispy grass like hair, and perhaps this was more widespread than it seemed. For the first time since I reached Middle East I saw fine horses —an occasional one or two ridden by Arabs—some of the horses richly caparisoned. Near Beersheba we came on a fine, upstanding camel walking with proud gait and more than usually disdainful lip. Was this the sort of a racing camel of which Lawrence wrote? Next a group of Arabs round a fire, examining a sword. " A lot o' swords about 'ere," said my driver. As we neared Bethlehem, we passed a halted armoured car with its machine gun pointing heavenwards and its British policeman

sitting therein. " We may get shot at along this road," said the driver. It was difficult to believe it. The view was quite splendid—rounded hills of stone, grey stone, reddish stone, stone that in the fading light became violet or blue—the scene dotted with clumps of cypress or olive trees. The road itself was first-rate, winding and running on ledges in the hillsides, or rising or falling in hill and valley. All was beautifully clean and windswept, and had a quality of grandeur. The air grew cold and we were glad to put on greatcoats.

October 9th, 1941.

The Arabs who occasionally shoot at or hold-up travellers after dark are bandits—so I'm told by a well-informed officer. He said they may ordinarily appear to be Arabs tilling the soil (burying their rifles for the time being) and blossoming as bandits when occasion offers. Were they political ? He thought not. The Arab is an individualist—a question of your notecase. (Another view is that they are paid by Germany or Italy and are disgruntled at the Jews and what they assert is British favouritism of the Jews.) I said the Arab bandits sound to me like Chinese bandits. He agreed. His view is that Syria and neighbourhood will remain quiet so long as we succeed. " It was never quieter than just after our conclusion of the Syrian campaign. They respect strength. You remember the old story of how the Germans tried to stir up trouble for us in Persia in the last war by saying it was our custom to shoot men from the mouths of cannon. That did us quite a bit of good. The Persians said : ' By gad ! If they do that, we must look out.' " But if Russia broke and Germany came through Turkey into Syria, we may expect some trouble behind us. Did he think Turkey would resist Germany in that case ? He said the Turkish Army is staunch. The relations between the Turks on the frontier and our own troops on that frontier are most cordial. They exchange cigarettes, drink coffee together and so forth. " Aleppo is our Peshawar," he said. Turkish war equipment is not up to Western standards, but they have some Hurricanes. " Their best weapon is their country." (One has heard something similar before, however.)

Of Syria, he said the more important Vichy people have now left the country—he thought matters were settling down, but there were " bad boys " still knocking about. Of Palestine, the Jews and Arabs had agreed to overlook their differences for the moment.

To-night I was asked to give an Austrian professor (ar anging talks, " soldier to soldier," which reach the German soldiers in Libya and elsewhere) some advice on what themes he should stress. I suggested he should labour this. What are you fighting for any longer ? How can any German soldier who reflects, believe any longer that Germany will win the war ? What hope is there with the British Commonwealth, the

United States and Russia against you? A year ago you were on top of the world—or thought you were. Where are you now? You might conceivably have won the war in the beginning, or soon after France collapsed. Now you have no hope whatever, for your enemies grow, gradually, stronger and stronger. Why then go on fighting? Fighting merely adds to the depth of hatred you have already built up against yourselves. Your only and best hope is to throw over Hitler and his Government and come to terms as soon as you can. I suggested he should write an imaginary talk between Hitler and Hess, taking place now, with Hess advising the Führer to give up; and that he should broadcast a letter from a German father to his son in Libya—a father who fought in the last war, who was always opposed to this war, who foretold that it would end as it is ending with the old enemies, Britain and U.S.A. and Russia, united against them—and concluding: "What are we any longer fighting for? The end will be the same as before—disaster."

So far as the new parts of Jerusalem go, one's first impressions were not far out. If you were to take part of the Sussex Downs, turn them from grass to stone and rock, plant on them new hotels, blocks of flats, business-houses, and insist that fine spaces should lie in between them, you might achieve a rough notion of the "new Jerusalem." It is most attractive—beautifully clean, airy, set on a hill and with hills surrounding her, and with views of great beauty. But how different is the old city within the city walls! Narrow, steep streets with cobbled pavements worn to slipperiness, and on both sides one shop jostling another, with foods, fruits, shoemakers, trinket-sellers, and every other sort of bazaar, the whole jammed, smelly, teeming with life, talking, arguing, gesticulating life, animals mixed with men and women, soldiers, police, prophets, priests, veiled women, goats, donkeys, all confused, till you cannot easily breathe. Down such a street we went our way to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

I've visited to-day several of those holy places, the Garden of Gethsemane and the Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem (enshrining the spot on which Christ was born), in addition to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem built on and around Calvary (though one opinion challenges this), where Christ was crucified, and the cave wherein his body was laid. They all struck me as lamentable evidence of man's inability to rise to the heights demanded by the subject. Compared with the nobility and grandeur of Jerusalem's hills, this garden and these churches are puerile or tawdry. It is a pity that Christ can be associated with any one place or city on this earth, and that our imaginations can be imprisoned by pieces of polished rock or slabs of stone over which burn forty or fifty lamps and round which can be built churches reeking of incense and ornamented or spoilt by masses of gilt, by daubs,

by hanging globules fit for a Christmas tree, and by the dropped wax of innumerable candles. I was extremely thankful to reach open air again, to smoke a cigarette and, at the first opportunity, to wash my hands. For I felt dirtied; not by the Garden of Gethsemane, of course, for this small square garden, 50 or 60 yards square, is most clean and excessively tidy —as a piece of Bournemouth's municipal garden is tidy; and, indeed, you would not readily distinguish between one and the other, for Gethsemane has neat grey paths and innumerable flowers in pots and studied beds of vari-coloured flowers, the whole as regimented as any suburban gardener could wish. In the middle are two or three ancient pieces of tree propped up with planks—trees which are said to belong to Christ's day. You may or may not credit that. But though you may not be unduly impressed, you will not be so deeply offended (I imagine) as you may well be by the churches I have named. Whether any religious order exists in the world which could have been trusted to handle with dignity and sweetness and simplicity these places where Jesus Christ was born and lived and died I doubt; but they have not been so handled here. The Orthodox Greek, the Orthodox Russian and the Catholic Church have each seized on such parts as they could to ornament (in their fashion) and glorify. The resultant medley of brass and gold and paint and galaxy of lamps burning and unburning, the mass of tall candles, the shrines encased in glass or otherwise, the chapels on the surface and in semi-dungeons, the stones kissed by innumerable lips and trod by even more innumerable feet, the priests anxious to sell you a candle to light your way or a certifictae to say you have, indeed, been a caller here, the heavy air impregnated by odours—all this seemed as far removed from anything that would have pleased the Carpenter from Nazareth as the stars are from this earth. Christ scourged the money-changers from the Temple; I wonder what he would say of this?

This evening I saw General Maitland Wilson at the King David Hotel; very genial, a burly man with an eye that can be shrewd in laughter or banter. We're doing some " hutting " (for tents above 2,000 feet aren't first-rate, though they may serve with braziers) and generally preparing.

Nobody appears to know whether the Germans will arrive or what the Turks will do.

He thought the plains of Anatolia a most inhospitable spot and that campaigning during January and February in northern Syria would be harsh—there's snow and plenty of rain by all accounts, though it's hard to get two folk to agree on the weather. Cyprus as an independent target for the Germans is a more difficult problem for them than it was. The Turks dislike us to cross their frontier—we're trying to get some of the frontier officers to join our officers in a meal.

His nickname is " Jumbo."

G. C. F. was over this way recently. He was much tickled by having a pink gin at the Hotel Tiberius. In Haifa he saw a cabaret entirely in German.

October 10th, 1941.

To-day I motored down to the Dead Sea—and was extremely glad to arrive. For the mountain road holds more hairpin bends than I remember elsewhere, and our utility car, as we rounded them, ground and hissed behind as though we were skidding round. But the noise proved to be a windscreen on the floor sliding about as the car tilted. Until now, motoring has not bothered me, but this ride, which took us down some 4,000 feet (for Jerusalem is 3,000 feet up and the Dead Sea 1,000 feet below sea-level), gave me no pleasure. The Dead Sea is not remarkable to look at: rocky hills rise on the far side, and the water—the sea is immense—has no strange look. When you get in it, however (we bathed), it has a certain stagnation, and my companion found it oily—said it created a film on his chest. Bathing here is the sort that you do to say you have done it—we lay about in the water, sitting in it holding ankles, shouting, " Try and turn over—hard to do it," and so on, like children with a new toy. A drop or two in your eye smarts a good deal and the taste is foul. " Like iodine," somebody said. The dressing-cabins have each a freshwater shower, and it's good to get under it. We had tea at a typical seaside wooden teashop and drove on to Jericho, whose walls fell to the trumpet blast. No walls there now—a sprawling village, citizens sitting at their doors, and in one instance two sheep lying, like faithful dogs, at the curb.

October 11th, 1941.

Drove to Haifa to-day through the Palestine mountains. What a lovely journey this is—the rocky hills have tints of brown and rose and violet and a dozen others indefinable; and what a perfect day ! This day in England would set a million tongues astir, but here it is common-place. Biblical figures trot or amble along astride donkeys (much burdened, most of them); some of the Arab faces are very fine and noble-looking; others as cunning as they make them. But those women who wear a black veil which shrouds them I find infinitely pathetic. The women and girls are mixed, some veiled, some not; among the latter children in their teens as lively as you could wish. In Haifa I ran into Bonn, of my golf club, whom I met in the Grand Gotel, Brussels, a few weeks before Dunkirk. He's a Lieutenant-Colonel, R.Es. now (a civilian soldier). It's amusing to note how this war has uprooted both of us (who never thought to see a second war) and thrown us over the globe so that we meet first in Belgium and now in Asia Minor. He's building aerodromes —creating in three months what normal Army routine would take nine

months to do. He took us to see one—the greater labour is draining the airfields, and building the runways. About a thousand men were busy, together with mechanical diggers and Lord knows what. One ditch was some 12 feet deep. They suffered in a rainstorm lasting twenty minutes the other day, but the fall was ½ inch ! I gather this labour in Palestine and Syria is welcomed by the people—one view given me is that we have spent as much in Syria in two months as did the French in twenty years and though this is, no doubt, drawing the long bow, it expresses (like other exaggerations) something of truth.

Haifa is more industrial than any town I have seen in the Near East: here's the end of an oil pipe-line; one heard the clank of metal being struck or worked, gasometers are among the scenery, and the streets are busy with trucks, carts, bicycles, and an odd assembly of workpeople. From Haifa we drove to Beyrouth along the coast—a blue sea with a few three-masted sailing ships, a coast-line rocky and picturesque. Along here fought the Australians this past summer: a wrecked building, a rusted overturned truck, a bridge being rebuilt—these mark the way. Not far from Beyrouth is an olive grove known for a hard tussle, and a dense banana grove, thick as a shrubbery and very large and square, between sea and road. Through this the Australians, I'm told, fought their way. (One wonders what the impediments were to going round.) This Syrian campaign must have had difficulties all its own—the Vichy French had a trick of placing opposite the Free French the very regiment or squadrons the Free French were drawn from; we were obviously anxious to do no more damage than was inevitable; for the first time in this war (I believe) we used horsed cavalry in terrain where tanks were impossible (and, anyhow, our tanks were but a handful). My informants who were through this campaign as onlookers tell me of an occasion where a commando of ours landed on the wrong side of a river and were cut up, and of a battalion of Royal Fusiliers surrendering after firing all their ammunition. " They had one anti-tank gun and two anti-tank rifles," said my informant. But, when all's said, we were outnumbered by the enemy, who had strong positions, and we defeated them.

October 12th, 1941.

Climbed 3,000 feet (by car) this morning to see General ——, who is well informed about this country. Did he think fighting would occur again here soon ? No, he didn't think it likely—not before the spring. The Germans would have a lot of tough country to cross before they got here. But, I said, would the Turks fight ? Would they, for instance, invite us into Turkey if Germany invaded them ? He looked profound and pursed his lips; then said it's all speculation. The Turkish politicians might hesitate and go on hesitating. The Turks were very short of tank equipment and stuff of that sort. They would like it from us—but we

hadn't been able to supply enough of it. The Germans were offering them guns, etc., but the Turks realised that guns with only a certain amount of ammunition (and one may add, perhaps, no spare parts) would place them in the German clutches pretty securely. The Turkish transport is old-fashioned, horse-drawn or ox-drawn, and is all very vulnerable to air attack. That was what happened largely in France—he recalled seeing French divisions with only about two guns left and those manhandled—the horses, etc., had perished in air attack.

He agreed that the Syrian Desert is suitable for tank warfare, but a German advance there would render them vulncrable to flank attack and he thought that even if they had all the equipment in the world, life could be made uncomfortable for them there. I asked was any part of the year unsuitable for campaigning in north Syria? He thought not. Of course, Syria could be attacked by air at any tine, but air attack divorced from land attack was not very effective; both would come together, no doubt, if and when they came.

I asked whether the spending of money by us and provision of work was improving our relations with the Syrians. He said our entrance had caused supplies to become short and prices to rise. Wheat, for instance was short—this owing to poor harvests. Syria had usually exported wheat to Turkey, Lebanon and elsewhere. Maldistribution, hoarding (owing to fear of war)—these had worsened the position. They had reason to fear war, because 300,000 folk in these parts perished of starvation in the last war—the Turks deliberately kept them short. I inquired what happens to adults of military age. There's no conscription he said, but volunteers were in the Vichy French forces and in the Free French also; and many are still with the Free French. They are no use for fighting outside their country, and even in it could hardly be relied on to hold a post 100 per cent. to the end.

The Syrians before the war began hated the French, and they still dislike the Free French. We work through the Free French, and although we are more popular than the French, there are obvious difficulties. (I'm told in another quarter that three weeks ago, 200 Arabs on the Turkish frontier refused to pay their taxes to the Free French, and fighting occurred in which a number of Arabs were killed. Roads have been a little dangerous to travellers in that region since.) The treaty with the Syrians is no more than a stop-gap—the Syrians arguing that, after all, how can they make a treaty with the Free French, whom even we do not recognise as a legal government? (The Turks recognise the Vichy Government, which makes another side issue for us and them.)

He said that an opinion in one place in Syria is not that of people fifty miles away; it is priest-ridden country ("Somebody has said that here every bishop is an archbishop; we have many Beatitudes"), we have Moslems and Jews and various sects of Christians. It is a properous country, in his view.

I said that Beyrouth looks a pleasant place. He said: " It's good to look at, but there's more malaria here than in any country occupied by our troops in the Middle East. The last month or two have been hell—a dead heat." (Both he and General Catroux have suffered from dysentery.)

Later in the day I talked with a distinguished American who has lived here for many years. This is what he told me: Before the French ran this country it was run by about half a dozen Turks. They had their marked imperfections, but there were only half a dozen people. The French brought in about 1,000 officials (a figure he used quite seriously) and had under them another horde of native officials. Some of them were high-minded, fine men, but some were not. Now, to deal with 1,000 as compared with half a dozen is irritating. Moreover, the French did almost nothing in the shape of public health or education, and their courts of law were not without blemish. The Syrians grew bitter. They were delighted when the British came in during the last war, and dismayed when Lawrence gave place to the French. They were again delighted when we marched in a few months ago—and once more dismayed when the British gave way to the Free French. Moreover, during the past few years the German propaganda has made great headway, especially with the young, but not confined to the young. What has done the British immense damage has (in the Syrian view) been our pandering to the Jews (as they think) and our working through the French. The Syrians (short-sightedly) think the Germans would clear out both the French and the Jews and allow Syrians to have their own country. A percentage of folk in Beyrouth are pro-German (he believes) and a larger percentage up country. Most of these think they have only to wait till the winter snows melt (this will be the back end of next April) before the Germans march down into Syria.

I asked what we can do to combat German propaganda and to make ourselves more popular. He said that, first, a pound of flour is worth much propaganda (we are bringing food in). Secondly, that the Syrians want good, just courts (this is a job for the French and difficult for us to deal with), they want economic prosperity (trade has languished here in Beyrouth because we and the French have not hit it off better commercially—he stressed the need for us to hammer out an efficient trade system after the war) and, lastly, the Syrians want to feel that they are a nation. He said they are a highly intelligent people. They are a mixed race (they've got some Crusader blood, among others) and often Lebanese will beat Armenians and Jews in the colleges. (The American College here is in its seventy-fifth year. They have over 700 students, some from as far as Java, South America and South Africa, mostly children of those who were natives of Beyrouth and went afield.)

It seems clear that we British here are suffering from our own tolerance

towards the Jews in creating Zionism (one view is that Lloyd George knew but little of the Arabs—he wanted money to win the last war, and the Jews were the readiest people to seek it from) and from the imperfect officialdom of the French.

I asked him what he thought of the new Syrian President. He said he is generally regarded as a " stooge " for the Allies, but that people think that so long as the Prime Minister and Council are pretty good, and they do seem to be pretty good, things won't be too bad. He said the Syrians are too intelligent to be impatient, and that if they thought we should put things right after this war they'd be pretty well content. They would like us British to take the country over, as distinct from the French. He said that perhaps a solution would be for us to advance through Libya, take North Africa and then do a swop, give the Free French North Africa in exchange for Syria. The Syrians would like that.

He had some interesting things to say of the recent fighting. The R.A.F. bombed Beyrouth a dozen or more times and the Germans and Italians about eleven times. At first everybody thought *all* the raids were British, and they did us a lot of harm, because many objectives that were not military objectives were hit. But then one day a bomb that was German was found. That put a different complexion on affairs. He produced some souvenirs—British leaflets written in French—one signed by Wavell, another by Wilson—that were dropped on the town. He said: "This little green one really did the trick. When this came down, Dentz, who was in his pyjamas, held a conference with two others, one of whom was in his full Quai d'Orsay regimentals." He continued: " One early morning we saw the British ships—cruisers I think they were—chase a destroyer. We had been awakened by the smoke-screen put out by the destroyer—very acrid it was—and we got up. It was just after dawn. We saw the firing to and fro—quite a spectacle." In those days they had 300 people who came to their house and grounds for protection each night.

Another interesting fact: forty-eight hours before the British arrived in Beyrouth, a civilian turned up in a small car looking distrait—he had passed the Australian lines by means of his passes and then, to his astonishment, found himself passing Vichy French down in the banana grove and the olive grove—Vichy French fingering their guns. Thus he came through both lines. " How did you get here ? " he was asked. " I really don't know," he said; and he said it with feeling.

My informant said that, in fact, the Jews are not a serious problem in Syria, but the Syrians are apprehensive of their infiltrating into the fertile regions near Damascus, knowing their own characters are not strong enough to withstand the prices the Jews offer. They think the Government should protect them against themselves. He said: " The Syrians dislike the French because the French have the same qualities

they possess themselves. But they respect the British, though they may dislike them—they respect them because they are not corrupt or open to bribery. The Moslims respect, and believe in, violence—that's one reason why they like the Germans." He added that in Iraq the wealthy folk all employ a Jew to run their businesses or their estates. " There's a saying that ' We hate all the Jews except the one that runs one's affairs.' "

October 13th, 1941.

The view from my window at Beyrouth this morning might be Torquay or any English resort: a rocky beach and men and boys in shorts fishing with long rods, a diving stage, a hotel round the bend. One can swiftly find unfamiliar things, of course: the money-changers in the street with handfuls of dirty notes (this Black Bourse gives you a better rate than the banks—about 9*d.* in the pound better), horses with necklaces of blue beads, two or three sheep having a dip in a rock-enclosed piece of sea, a medley of undisciplined traffic and folk in the streets, French and Arabs and Syrians and Australians. The Syrian pound is worth about 2*s.* 2*d.*, so that you dine and your bill is £6 Syrian or so (with wine).

I'm told that about 38,000 Vichy soldiers have left this country by convoy and that some 8,000 came over to the Free French, but these figures may not be beyond reproach. One wonders whether some of those are left behind by Vichy to do Vichy's work ? Doubtless. In the Syrian campaign we had about 200 killed and 1,800 wounded. How small the casualities seem to soldiers of the Great War, and how thankful we may be !

To-day we drove to Aleppo. Our driver speaks the rich Doric of Lancashire—the other day he says he lighted on a staff sergeant who lives " three doors " from him at home. A truck swerved dangerously past us. Somebody said: " That was the Salvation Army." Our driver quoth: " Well, he'll need some savin' if he drives like that."

I heard to-day how an Italian sentry who sang opera assisted—inadvertently—two of our men to escape from Derna last year. The sentry was singing his heart out without let or hindrance—very loud, but growing fainter as he reached the far end of his beat. When the flower song from *Carmen* (or whatever it was) could barely be heard, our men bolted for it.

A short while ago I was roasting in the desert. To-day I talked with an Australian who was down from among the clouds, 8,000 to 9,000 feet up far beyond the cedars of Lebanon. Snow is being melted up there to make tea ! He said: " You ought to go up—the views are grand—but

you'd have to do it by pack mule, and you need overcoats and whatnot —it's damned cold at night." I asked if the height affected breathing. He said: " You keep stopping, going up—every hundred yards or two—even the mules feel it. It's one in four. But after you've been up a couple of days, you feel fine. Our chaps live in little bivvies—burn petrol contraptions to get some heat—there's no wood up there. No life—only goats. Pebbly stuff underfoot—the going's not bad once you're up, but sometimes you walk in clouds, so that you can't see ahead, and when it clears you may find there's a drop from one mountain to another of several thousand feet."

As we drive to and fro, Arab urchins cock up a thumb to us and we laugh and cock one back in return. They give us the V sign with two fingers, too, and shout, " Shorge " to us. We aren't Tommy here; we're George, all of us.

An Intelligence Officer, speaking of difficulties hereabouts, said there are five religions in Aleppo, each with three secret societies. " Some people are pro-German or pro-Turkish—others passive." The left part of the Turkish-Syrian frontier he thought pretty good to hold, the right consists of desert suitable to tanks or camel corps. He thought frontier fraternisation was decreasing by orders from above on both sides. The Germans left behind them about £10 Syrian a man as bribery (about 25*s*.), and Aleppo still has German agents whom we pursue. No unpleasant incidents of importance (clashes) have occurred. One phrase: " There are hundreds of miles of desert on the frontier with d—— all in the shape of troops—you'd need all the armies in the Middle East to guard it thoroughly."

We drove up to a frontier post; the country is rich-looking, soil as red as Devon's in some parts. This post was on a road running through fairly low, bare hills. We have a Custom House with one or two French officials, but we have also a corporal in our Intelligence Service who is on good terms with the Turkish Guards. He is not British—I thought him French, but my colleague was certain he's a German Jew. When he first came here three months ago, the Turks (he said) were pro-German; next they swung to pro-British, and now, for some three weeks, he feels they have turned pro-German again. (I doubt this.) Until that time he could buy eggs and poultry freely from them (and much cheaper than in Syria), but the reply now is that they have none. Moreover, it fairly often happened, he said, that he went over the frontier and joined them in coffee; that does not occur at the moment.

We walked down the road to where the Turkish guard stood, a hefty young man of twenty-five or so with good teeth (one gold), wearing a grey uniform with gaiters to the knee, boots with the soles coming from

the uppers and the cloth of his suit as much like worn sail-canvas as anything else. If his suit has been passed from one soldier to another it would not surprise me. His rifle was dated 1891—fifty years old. He looked the soldier of an impecunious state (as he is). He was very friendly, glad to have a cigarette. Responding to his shout, his corporal came along from 300 yards off; also friendly, shook hands gravely, bowed his head doing so and looked at our boots. But none of us, not even our Intelligence corporal, could speak any Turkish, and the Turks had nothing but their own language. So after smiling at one another and feeling how absurd it was that we were no better than dumb creatures, we withdrew. Our corporal told us, by the way, that a number of Turkish deserters come over the frontier. They are wretchedly clad, with hardly any boots at all (some are barefoot). They complain that their pay is too small, their food bad and speak ill of their officers. (But maybe their main fear is of war coming and, anyhow, deserters are not very reliable informants.)

We now drove on a narrow road through a mountain gorge to another frontier post thirty or forty miles distant. Lord knows what would have happened had we met an oncoming vehicle, for the track had no more than inches to spare. The sun was lost and cool blew the wind. This post was in flat, tilled country, on a road alongside which ran a second road that remained Syrian for five miles further on. As we stood looking over the frontier, two French mounted guards came up, well-horsed and smart—speaking nothing but Arabic. After a brief while, two Turk guards, with even better horses, and looking finely turned-out, rifles across their backs, rode up. A French gendarme (unshaven, good-humoured and on excellent terms with the Turks) spoke with these two last-named and we were, a moment or two later, invited to go and see the Turk lieutenant in charge of the post—a man about thirty with a youthful look, a small moustache and merry eyes. But he'd a bark for his men, a cluster of whom came out to take a look at us in the same washed-out uniforms as the other guard. They scuttered back when he bawled. A few young trees were growing, making a small attenuated glade, and into this kitchen chairs were fetched and we sat down and gave the Turks cigarettes (for the Turk lieutenant had a police official with him, wearing a loud suit and cloth cap, as young men do down East in London). Here again talk was almost impossible—we were translated English to French, French to Arabic, Arabic to Turkish. We learned there'll be heavy rains next month and snow from January to April, but the questions one would have liked to put seemed to me inadmissible, in view of Turkey's neutrality—so, after a brief while, we shook hands again and parted.

The French gendarme shares a post with our troops, but not one of them speak French and he doesn't speak English. In this fix, misunderstandings are easy, and we sadly need more interpreters; if we can't

raise enough for each post, then we ought to have some mobile interpreters who would visit each post morning and evening.

The Frenchman hadn't observed any change in the relations between himself and the Turks—nothing apparently to support what we had been told at the first frontier post. He said, however, that in this neighbourhood smuggling is rife—even sheep and horses go over the frontier at night. It's clear, with posts seven miles apart, that after dark anybody could cross with ease. If weather is inclement (I was told), the French guards stay indoors.

An Australian lieutenant said that the Turks knew who he was within four hours of his arriving near the frontier; one greeted him by name—they knew his junior officer, too. He told us an amusing tale of how, when they threw benzine over some filthy native latrines and set fire to it to sterilise the place, the benzine went off with a great bang—so much so that the Arabs thought this was the gun signalling the end of their fast, Ramadan, and they all set to on their food, eating hours too soon.

A Turkish atmosphere pervades this neighbourhood; the men wear a strange nether garment that's like a skirt to the knees (a vast bag behind) and then turns into trousers. My conducting officer, who's lived out East for twenty years, says this garment was the outcome of the belief held hereabouts that the next Messiah will be born of a man—and each one is getting ready in case he's the mother! Here's a fine excuse, if anybody wants one, for homosexuality.

Note in passing: In Tobruk, Italian tomato ketchup was turned by us into camouflage paint and we made good patrol boots out of Australian felt hats with old motor-tyres for soles.

On a plain two and a half miles from Aleppo we passed a stone, lettered slab, a memorial to the fact that here, on October 26th, 1918, the last engagement between British and Turkish troops was fought in the Great War.

October 14th, 1941.

A well-informed officer dined with us at our request. He knows Turkey well—said he believes 90 per cent. of the Turk Army and 100 per cent. of their Navy and Air Force are pro-British. The Turk Army equipment, if not good, is good compared with the civilian standard of clothing and so forth. The people have been denuded of much to build railways and all manner of things. (Railways, not butter.) The Turk soldiers, he said, are well-disciplined, but stupid; they'll do what they are told—and what they can do on a chunk of bread, an onion and some water is remarkable; they can keep going on that. They've no imagination. (But how inaccurate these general statements must be.) They can

use tanks and mechanical equipment till the stuff goes wrong—but they're hopeless at repairing it or servicing it. We are sending equipment to them constantly. (One may comment: let's hope it is used against the enemy and not captured by Germany.)

He agreed this is a region of the world where nothing succeeds like success—the Turks are influenced by our success or failures elsewhere (the Arabs are like the handful of Irish extremist Republicans, who wish to be on the winning side, whichever it is), but the Turks have a tradition of administration and are not entirely self-seeking. He went on to say that success is the only propaganda worth much here—that and food. We are bringing into Syria several hundred tons of flour a day, but it isn't enough to provide reserves and to stop hoarding; folk who normally kept flour in the house and baked their bread now hoard the flour and rush off to the bakery for loaves. Flour recently rose 200 to 300 per cent. in price. Most Moslems hate all Europeans, and the Germans are liked better than the French (and perhaps better than we are), because they are absent. (The Germans, one may say, are in the position of a political party not in power, which can promise the earth.) But trade is of the highest importance. Aleppo is fanatical about trade (it had about 90 per cent. of the country's trade, he said), as Damascus is fanatical on politics and Hama on religion. We are importing flour and kerosene and coffee and sugar (sugar has been extremely scarce and, in mountain regions, flour also). Religion creates problems, too. Aleppo, for instance, has about five different sorts of Catholics in addition to a wealth of others; the city has some fourteen archbishops and bishops. Most religions dislike the rest. The important thing is to prove to the Syrians that we can command the seas and bring in supplies.

The hotel where we dined was full not very long ago of Germans. German aircraft roared over the city. The French, challenged about it, denied there were any aircraft—next said that they made forced landings.

October 15th, 1941.

An American long resident in Aleppo talked to me at length. He said: "The French here all suffer from an inferiority complex as a result of the collapse; they are psychopathic—more concerned about maintaining the prestige of France than about winning the war or getting on with the war. Some of them are their own most severe critics—one whom I know writes to General Gentilhomme about it. The Syrians find that the bulk of French officials in Aleppo are precisely the same officials as before the British came in, and, since they allege that some of those officials made a good deal last February and March out of distributing food, they are not pleased at the present situation. It's a pity the British did not, at all events, see that French officials changed about—those from Aleppo to Damascus and so forth.

" If the British could improve trade—get the French to issue more export licenses and import licenses (it's almost impossible just now to get anything in, even from Palestine)—it would be of great advantage. Sugar and kerosene are coming in, and that helps. To win Aleppo over, you must improve trade, and it is highly desirable to bring Syria into the sterling *bloc*.

" Some of Vichy French were doubtless left behind as members of the Free French; the British, I believe, are rooting them out. The Syrians here do not think anything of their supposed dependence—things go on just the same. Moreover, the Arabs know that if their independence is to amount to anything, they must, somehow, be linked with Arabs in Palestine, Transjordan and elsewhere; they know, in other words, they must look to the British more than the French. The French know this, too, and dislike the fact.

" The Turks, in my view, are friendly, though they will not commit suicide for that friendliness. But they have lively memories of the last war, when they fought with the Germans and were treated by them like dogs—the saying is that Turkish lieutenants had to clean German privates' boots. Besides, Germany has given Turkey a bad deal in commerce—delayed payments for goods, sent poor materials (once when they sent four new ships, those ships had to be overhauled in dry dock within three months). I think Turkey would fight Germany unless Germany could attack her at both ends at once, in which case Turkey would probably not resist. But if Turkey has only one front or a front and a half, I think she would fight. Personally, I don't think there'll be fighting on this front till the spring—in the Caucasus and the Taurus Mountains there are only about six usuable highways; you could hold the Caucasus and the Taurus Mountains with a tenth of what you'd need in the plains. The Anatolian plateau in the winter is a most inhospitable place. Nobody here expects much to happen before spring. Besides, if Hitler had intended returning in this direction this autumn, I don't think he would so easily have surrendered Syria this summer; he had plenty of aircraft here, and he could have made it very difficult for the British to take Syria had he wished."

He said Aleppo has been a city for 4,000 years—Damascus is a rival in antiquity; none others are older. To-day it is very large—330,000 people; you have to go in an eastern direction as far as Bombay to find a larger.

Aleppo is something of a sounding board for tidings from various quarters. I've met, for example, several travellers from enemy-occupied countries. A merchant lately in Greece said: " Greek morale is remarkably high. They talked to me constantly of what will happen when the British return, saying there'll then be no more Germans or Italians here." He added: " I came across Italian soldiers who've deserted, got

into civilian clothes and are living in Greek villages and even Athens. I was occasionally mistaken for one and spat upon by Greeks as I passed. Italian morale is so low that when a forest fire recently broke out near Athens and Greek villagers turned out with picks and shovels to quench it, Italian soldiers who saw the Greeks running in their direction immediately threw down their rifles and began to shout '*Bono Greco*.' Germans are much fewer than Italians, but more ruthless. They have a trick of firing a shot just in front or just behind a passer-by to terrify him, and during the night at half-hourly intervals one often hears a couple of shots fired to remind the Greeks of Germans' presence. Italians swagger about in couples, trying to keep their courage up. Food is short; not only food shops, but clothing shops, too, are raided by the enemy and ransacked till empty, so that they have to close down. Despite all this, the Greeks remain full of courage and, when R.A.F. aircraft come over, commonly gather in the streets to cheer and have to be forced indoors by the enemy."

Another interesting account was given me concerning Rhodes. This second traveller said that in Rhodes the food situation among Greek civilians is desperate. Cases of fainting in the streets among women from malnutrition are common. " People will give anything, almost sell their souls, for a tin of bully." German and Italian armed forces fare better, because a couple of months ago about 130,000 cases of tinned meat were salved from a sunken supply ship. Italian civilians fare better also, because they're not rationed anything like the Greeks. Asked whether he thought enemy aircraft in Rhodes were increasing, he said he thought the contrary was true, because some Stukas had been sent to Russia. Road transport includes some British captured in Greece.

October 16th, 1941.

It rained heavily during the night, and Aleppo this morning is changed to an English October day—as cold as that. Started the day in shorts, but this afternoon was wearing a greatcoat. A taste of what lies ahead.

Saying by man old in knowledge of the East: Expect no gratitude from an Oriental. Whatever you give him he wants double.

The soldiers call an Egyptian a " Wog "—satirically interpreted as " Worthy Oriental Gentleman."

An Australian officer who was present with the British Cabinet at the Abbey service for the second anniversary of the war, gave a lively description of Winston. Winston, he said, marched in with his cigar,

saying: " Well, what are we waiting for? Let's get on." He was told that an air raid siren had sounded and that the King and Queen were delayed. " Ring them up and tell them it's best not to come," he said.

Drove back to Beyrouth. At Hama we saw women shrouded in black—heavy black veils over their faces—a horrible sight. They need some Christabel Pankhursts hereabouts.

I've been reading *Britain by Mass-Obersvation*—the best piece of reporting I've yet found. Therein a workman writes an account of his day, in language half-American, half-slang—dreadful stuff. He took his girl near a wood at night. They both felt it was eerie. " Good pull up for spooks," was his comment.

At Homs the Aussie lads have taken to churchgoing as the only way of seeing the girls—the Arabs sing the hymns in Arabic and the Aussies in English. The sermon is preached in both languages. At Baalback are the ruins of the Temple of Jupiter—1,600 years old, colossal, and most grand. I haven't seen the Acropolis, but it cannot have been in its day much finer than this. Standing atop a ruined wall was a young R.A.F. officer painting. He shouted to me: " Is that Hodson? " I called back: " Yes, but I don't recognise you." He jumped down and ran over to us. He formerly worked in Wimbledon, half a mile from my house. He said: " I heard your voice and thought ' I know who that is.' " He joined up last year, came out here, and was switched to wireless intelligence; after that he got jaundice and is on sick leave. That's what war can be like if you're lucky—or is it unlucky?

A Jewish recruiting campaign is afoot in Palestine. A good many certificates are being given (so it's said) by heads of villages to say that you are such or such an age. If a boy is fourteen, his father on enlistment can obtain an allowance for him. Such a father whose boy was, in fact, sixteen gave the certificate vendor 10 piastres for a document saying his lad was fourteen. With that he proudly and delightedly went home. But the door was opened by his son of sixteen surprisingly and suddenly in uniform, for he had given the same certificate merchant 10 piastres to certify that he was nineteen, and he had joined up! (It's a good story, anyway.)

A British officer who was a civilian in Rumania as recently as last January had an encounter there with one of Gestapo Himmler's right-hand men. But a mild one. He had known this youth before the war, stayed with him as a fellow-guest—a handsome lad, titled, ideas fixed on Hitler. They now met in the street, both in plain clothes.

" Hullo."

" Hullo."
" You still here then ? "—from the German.
" Why shouldn't I be ? "
A smile from the German. They shook hands.
" Well——"
" Well, so long "; and they went on their ways.
The Englishman left Rumania soon afterwards—had to go.
In those days Bucharest was full of German soldiers. The restaurants were crowded. If a German soldier departed from a restaurant in which German officers sat among the other folk, the soldier would stop at the door, click his heels and deliver himself of a vigorous salute to the whole room.

I thought of this on our drive to Beyrouth. About 1 p.m. we were passing a small hutment camp of Australians. Our Lancashire driver quoth: " It's about one o'clock, isn't it ? I could get some tea 'ere." He looked inquiringly at the Major. The Major acquiesced—and the driver stopped the car near the huts and went off to seek a meal from the Aussies, while we ate our sandwiches in the car.

October 17th, 1941.

A devil of a job last night to get off my article to the *Sunday Times* from Beyrouth; military censor passed it to political censor (who was broadcasting—had to wait for him), but he couldn't O.K. it without referring to another man. After that, the Radio-Orient Company said they couldn't despatch it, as I was not on their books. Arguments, telephone talks, a journey in darkness to Radio-Orient, during which a crazy Army driver of another truck cannoned into us, and thence into a tramcar. All this took three hours. This morning Radio-Orient, who had sent the message to Haifa, rang up to say Haifa were now querying my collect arrangements in London (payment at London end). More talks, more journeys, more instructions to Haifa taking best part of the morning. During the past ten days or so I have motored 1,500 miles and talked with a score of people (or more) to produce material for three or four articles. For every hour's investigation I have spent about eight in travel. I like motoring less and less. My driver this morning only escaped an accident by violent swerving. In my view most of our drivers go too fast. On the way to Aleppo I protested—we had been doing at times sixty or more miles an hour on roads of varying quality. The speed indicator read frequently 100 kilos and at times 110 kilos an hour. The officer in charge of the car said the indicator was faulty, unreliable; the driver said his speed had been forty miles—which I described as nonsense. To-day I came to Haifa in a Renault and again, in my opinion, we careered along too fast. A Renault is a light, flimsy car (or

this was) and when you get off the macadam road on to the sandy verge (or have one wheel on each) you execute a wild little swerve. Maybe I was to blame for talking to the driver. We had an interesting conversation. He won the Military Medal in the Warwicks in the last war, but is now an R.A.S.C. driver—which does not by any means fill him with delight. He's forty-two, but he'd like to be with an infantry battalion—thinks the way to beat dive-bombers is to give them plenty of small-arms fire—he's got little use for dug-outs and slit trenches for protection and suspects the building of enormous shelters in Britain against bombers was Fifth Column work. He thinks there's been too much concentration on saving life in this war—" You won't beat the Germans working on that principle "; in his opinion, every soldier ought to expect the worst and be ready for it. " I hear men saying ' Well, there won't be much traffic against us if we have to get out here.' That's all wrong; the wrong idea. Lectures ought to be given to the troops—teach 'em what war is really like." He doesn't like the Labour Party much. What was Snowden doing taking a peerage? Was J. H. Thomas any good, or Ramsay ? But he was quite reasonable and saw the point when I said that Snowden was right to take a peerage to put the labour point of view in the House of Lords—somebody has to put it. He told me how, when he was eleven years old, his mother sent him off to school one day (in London) saying he would find his dinner on the table when he came home (she was off to work herself—had to keep him and his brother). He replied, " All right, Mum," but on setting forth he turned right instead of left because he thought it about time he found a job. He wandered up to Whitehall and thought: " There ought to be something to do for me round here," and he got a job as pageboy at Whitehall Court. He earned his livelihood from then on. " You can't say many words I don't know the meaning of, and I've got it all by reading." He's something of " a character "—came out to Egypt as a sergeant-major, but there was something he didn't like and now he's a private—gave up ten shillings a day for his principles. " I've never gone against my convictions yet and I've never regretted it; I won't go against them for ten shillings a day." He described an incident in Russia—he served there for a while about 1919: " I was riding in a tram and I got up to give an old peasant woman my seat. There was a Russian officer in the tram and they all seemed scared of him—*he* took the seat. I was pretty strong then and I got hold of his two big epaulettes on his shoulders and I pulled him out of the seat. But the old woman was frightened—she wouldn't sit down till I made her. I think he'd have killed me if he could—he looked that way."

October 18th, 1941.

Last night the military telephone exchange at Haifa were kind enough to get through to my rooms in Cairo; I wanted to warn them that

I was returning. I was asked my name, of course. Ninety minutes later they rang me up from the exchange to say they had been through to Cairo and had asked for Lieut. Hodson, and he was not there. As a bit of bungling, it was extraordinarily neat.

I am back in Cairo after a train journey of nineteen hours made very agreeable by three Australian majors in my compartment. One had not been to bed—looked well on in the forties—but he didn't seem to be tired, and rattled along in talk fifteen to the dozen, producing souvenirs and whatnot. He had an enormous fountain pen a good ½-inch thick captured from an Italian doctor, a French map of Dezzine and several French pay-books. He offered me the map and a pay-book, but souvenirs are not my cup of tea. (I did, however, bring an Italian rifle out of Tobruk, a short, clumsy rifle compared with ours—I thought I might find it useful in emergency—and distinguished myself by leaving it on the destroyer; discovered my loss, returned to look for the destroyer, but she had moved from the dock.) This Australian had a Cockney wit; he told one of his men on the platform to be like the boy on the burning deck, stay put; asked me had I ever considered why "Honest to God" should be more respectable than "Honest to Christ"; described how he was told in Australia that nobody wears a Sam Browne nowadays, came without one and is the poor relation at all the parties; and went on to ask if any of us were likely to be with him on October 20th, because that was going to be a momentous day; he had embarked on October 20th in the last war, disembarked on October 20th in this war, his father was born on October 20th, and he's got a hunch the war will end on October 20th next year. (I've met a few Australians this week who've had no winter since 1938 or 1939—they've managed to skip it by travelling round the world.)

Two majors had come down from the snowbelt I mentioned a day or two ago. One said: "I slept in plain fatigue dress with two pullovers and four blankets and still I shivered. We're chipping ice up there. In one blizzard the mules wouldn't move along the track—the track got covered, nobody knew where it was, and a mule might put a foot down and find itself dropping twenty feet. You've no idea what the wind's like." But even in June there are places in Syria which, in the early morning, can be bitter. A major in an Australian Scots battalion said: "When we were on the Litany River, it was damned cold. June that was. Have you ever had your stomach shiver inside? We did. You had to wade that river to get over—up to your middle—and you stayed cold and our stomachs shivered like that." He dithered his hand. "The C.O. and I had whisky in our tea every morning and a couple of stiff tots at night—kept us going. Our men got so exhausted for a few days at that time that bully beef passed right through—you could see it undigested on the ground. We had to have donkeys to get rations up, so one day I sent

out my chaps to scrounge fifty donkeys as best they could and bring the Wogs with them if need be. We paid well for them, of course. We lost some of those donkeys nearly every day from sniping.

"The French had ten tanks for our one, and if they'd known how weak we were, it would have been tougher. They thought we had twice as many men—two divisions instead of one, because some good bloke on the Staff thought of calling us the 'Australian Exporter Division' when we went to Syria, and when the French captured one or two from that division and one or two from the Seventh Division, they reckoned we were both there. My battalion succeeded because we always attacked from the flank and because we always started just before dawn—the French didn't like fighting in the dark. Often we got right in among 'em before dawn and then their artillery, finding us all mixed up, couldn't open fire."

This officer inspected the French ordnance after the armistice and found some artillery dated as far back as 1870—veritable museum pieces; and some ammunition dated 1912, 1913 and 1914. He found also a few beautiful brass lamps that burned candles. During this work of inspection he made good friends with a few of the Vichy French officers—he spoke most highly of several. (I heard in Aleppo of a Vichy French colonel who said that he felt he simply couldn't fight against the British and was on the point of giving up the sponge when he saw coming towards them Free French troops wearing British helmets; he said he couldn't stomach that, and ordered his men to fire.) This Australian officer asked a high Vichy officer if, supposing the Germans invaded Syria, whether the Vichy troops would fight alongside the Germans. He was indignant at the idea, saying: "The Germans are not our allies."

He told me a story of a cool Australian gunner officer who found himself, when observing, suddenly surrounded by French tanks and by French soldiers, who lay down near him. He had a telephone to his battery; he spoke into it in a low voice saying what the situation was and then added, as though on parade: "Battery, stand down." (Last year, when Sollum was in a kind of no-man's-land, an Australian officer on reconnaissance lay on top of Sollum Barracks alone, watching through glasses. Three German officers and an Italian officer drove up in a car, got out right beneath his nose, the Germans pulled out typewriters and began typing out reports; finished, packed up their machines and drove off—without discovering our man.)

The Australian Major I've quoted is forty-five and his colonel is forty-six; both were infantrymen in the last war. I asked how they stand the rigours. He said, "Very well"; for instance, he himself had sandfly fever with a temperature that ran up to 104, but he got out and about

next day; some of his men were laid up for ten days with it (I believe three or four days is more usual). He thought his experience in the last war has proved of great advantage. " I was very curous how I'd react to shelling—so was the C.O. about himself. But we were all right—quite satisfied." He smiled drily. His battalion played a salute on their bag-pipes when General Auchinleck, C.-in-C., visited them. Auchlinleck whispered to him afterwards: " You know, you shouldn't do that for me, I'm a Lowlander."

These Australians are fine to get on with, friendly, generous, no fuss at all. Extraordinary what a type their faces are; many of them, like Cassius, have a lean and hungry look, beaky noses, small chins, creased, piercing grey eyes. A colleague asserts some of them resemble kangaroos. Does the future of the British race lie with the Dominions—the Anzacs, the Canadians, the South Africans and so forth ? I sometimes think so.

October 23rd, 1941.

An Australian major who has been serving in Syria told me he had dropped across two curious facts—first that olive trees are, quite often, not owned by the man who owns the soil; and two, that an Arab acquaintance had informed him that his wife would cease to be his wife on such and such a day and hour and go back to her parents—he had bought her only for a limited period.

To-day when Shagreen (the nearest I can get to his name) brought on to the table a new dish of jam, Mrs. K. said: " I wonder what it is ? Perhaps rose jam."

" Do you mean jam made from roses ? "

" Yes. All the Balkan countries make it, too. It is very nice—full of perfume. They make it from the petals. The Egyptians make a lily jam too—they take a large flower, roll it up, stitch it to keep it in shape, plunge it into syrup and after a time remove the stitches. No, I don't like *that*. The perfume is too strong."

How disgoosting, as Ros would say.

Shagreen (something of an Admirable Crichton—he can mend cars, sew on buttons, make the best soups I've ever dropped across) had a day off yesterday. Ramadan has ended and they are all feasting. An Englishman who knows Cairo well said to me: " There'll be a couple of hundred hospital cases to-day—stomach-pump cases a lot of 'em, through over-eating and drinking." For two days we've had no morning papers and yesterday Cairo had its rumours—that a British offensive had begun. Tommy-rot.

October 14th, 1941.

I came to-day to spend a few days with a group of our Wellington bombers near the Canal. The Group Captain has kindly asked me to stay with him—his house is near the Bitter Lake; we got a swim this afternoon. He's a remarkable man—about forty-six I should say. Won the D.S.C. three times in the last war (Naval Air Service). On his first bombing raid (about 1916) he was away nine and a half hours on a Sopwith, flying alone, and dropping a stick of four 100-lb. bombs on a German powerhouse, putting it out of action for three weeks. After that he transferred to fighters and shot down thirty-nine confirmed enemy (which no doubt means at least forty-five). He did a bit of instructing—but used to tell his men: "You'll learn to fly over Cambrai" (meaning, against the enemy). If you lasted the first fortnight you stood a chance of going on. He says tactics are much the same—but to-day, instead of a tight little circle in which you fly round, tiring out your enemy, waiting till he goes round the other way, whereupon he comes across your sights and you get him, the circle is now many times as big. Also, whereas in the last war flying was to some degree a job of artistry, delicate touch, etc., it is less so now—now it's more of an engineer's job, so many more controls, gadgets, so much more speed. However, I've no doubt the basic qualities are much the same—nerve, eye, touch, judgment, courage. What good is a man without all these? My host was flying in France at eighteen and a squadron-leader at twenty-one. He's a Canadian—they grow up quicker in our Dominions. From time to time he has men up before him for commissions; but he asks them no fixed questions—just leads them on from one thing to another trying to discover if they've got leadership in them—for they need leadership in these days when many a man becomes a wing-commander (equal to a lieutenant-colonel) in three years. Being merely a good pilot isn't enough. At this station we've got a squadron-leader who is second pilot on a machine and a junior officer captain of it. (I'm interpolating this note some days later. In the first bomber, wherein I flew 500 miles, our captain was a sergeant and our rear-gunner a pilot officer. In the second bomber wherein I went to bomb Crete, our captain was a pilot officer of twenty-one and our rear-gunner a flying officer—one rank higher—nearly old enough to be his father. Now there's no question who's the boss—it's the captain.)

There's a school nearby to which Army officers come to learn something about air co-operation; some of them have a good deal to say, for the soldier likes to see our aircraft about, and when they are not visible, he thinks them non-existent. This is not always so. If fighters are protecting him, warding off enemy, they'll probably be so high in the heavens as to be invisible. When the soldier is dive-bombed, he naturally thinks we ought to do dive-bombing in return. But so far we have

had virtually no dive-bombers. The problem has been the very fundamental one of shortage of aircraft, and when we began to build fast, the problem was which sort to build. Had we built dive-bombers instead of Hurricanes, the Battle of Britain would have been lost; as it was, we got very near the bone to losing. I hear it argued that if you have supremacy in the air you don't need dive-bombers, and if you haven't they won't be any good to you, because you will not be able to use them. But I wish we had a good supply of them, all the same. I hear it argued, too, that we have been slow in developing air transport—that the Italians largely kept their troops going by air transport in Abyssinia and that the Germans are doing it to-day in Libya. The Italians have, so to say, carried fighters in the body of the whale. We ought, it is argued, to have asked (for example) Australia to make masses of Valentia aircraft for us—machines largely built of wood, which could do the job well enough. (It is quite common to find our officers halfway between juniors and those at the top bubbling over with ideas and notions, many of which strike me as eminently sensible. For instance, another officer talks to me about a plan for dropping bombs far more vertically than we do—he's sure it can be done. He has argued it for years without success. Bombs often drop now at angles so far from vertical that they almost skid or bounce along and their penetration power is small. We are painfully slow to learn—indeed, one sometimes feels we mostly learn only by disasters.)

Coincidences can be remarkable. Towards the end of July I left my valise behind at Durban to come on by sea. I had begun to despair of it reaching me. A day or two ago I learnt it had been traced and would arrive three weeks hence. Thinking it unsafe to wait three weeks for warmer clothing, I yesterday morning bought a second sleeping bag and a serge uniform. Half an hour later the telephone rang—the long-lost valise had turned up !

When a German bomber fell into the sea not long ago it was thought one member had vanished (the others were found, dead or alive). Suppose he had been eaten by a shark ? A little publicity to that might be a deterrent and discouragement to the enemy, might it not ? But then somebody said : " What of the effect on our own airmen ? " " Oh," was the reply, " tell *them* the shark is all nonsense." However, it was established the enemy aircraft only carried the men found; so the problem was solved.

The spirits of our airmen are very high. Over lunch to-day in the Mess a good deal of banter flew about. A Wing-Commander who has done close on seventy bombing raids (D.F.C. and bar), who was formerly a ship's radio operator, and who is an enormous figure about 16 stones, had us all chuckling. He was saying : " Night fighters, old boy; that's

the thing. I'm putting myself in for it. Breakfast in bed, two extra meals a day, and the doctor coming round saying, ' Take it easy, old boy. Take it easy. Where are your dark glasses ? ' "

October 25th, 1941.

Immunity from losses here has been remarkable. We carried out nearly 200 sorties in a recent month without a loss. Only the highest skill and courage can achieve that. The lads now call the run to Benghazi (which we have raided seventy and eighty nights in succession) the " mail run." They assert the aircraft can find their own way, like old horses. We reckon we are destroying at least 30 per cent. of everything which the enemy sends to North Africa, and probably more. Petrol is the crux —we must destroy that. That will be the key. But in the nature of things, the percentage of hits on ships tied up to quays is small. Over convoys we do better. There was a convoy left Italy for Tripoli—ten ships started, but only two arrived; the submarines torpedoed two, the Blenheims got two, the Wellingtons two more and the Naval aircraft two of the last four. Only two reached Tripoli, and they were bombed that night. On another occasion a Group Captain, middled-aged, was himself out from Malta: for several hours he shadowed a convoy, then radioed for his bombers, and of those four ships we sank two and hit the other two. That Group Captain has himself been out on eleven raids. What men these are ! He drove me along at seventy-five miles an hour. (Later on, the other Group Captain drove me at eighty miles an hour. I expected the car to soar into the air at any moment. These flying-men, once bitten by speed, are the devil to drive with. I don't mind how fast I go in the air, but on the earth—that is another pair of shoes.)

A friend of Sir Dudley Pound, our First Sea Lord, tells me Pound can get along on two hours' sleep. Nelson said he could do that, also. Nelson was often pacing the deck in the middle of the night. He had breakfast at 3 a.m. often enough. Napoleon often managed on three hours' sleep, too. Greatness in men of action springs usually, in part, from physical strength or toughness. They must be lucky in dodging the bullets, too. Napoleon had nineteen horses shot under him.

A wing-commander, Irish, light-hearted, says the first time *Flak* comes up at you, you are frightened a lot. After that you get used to it. Then, after a good many times, you begin to think, " This is too good to last " —then you want a rest. He spoke of the beautiful colours of the *Flak*— reds, greens, yellows and of the pretty or picturesque look of the desert or sea at certain times, or of towns being etched black and white in moonlight. I talked later with other experts. A fragile, dark-eyed lad of twenty-two, making his forty-ninth raid, said the light *Flak* rises towards you terribly slow (or seems to) until it is close to you—then it comes up

with a terrific " Whoosh." A squadron-leader who has bombed Naples said the *Flak* from the Italian Navy came up like a red snowstorm going the wrong way. Describing the explosion of our heaviest bomb, he said: " You see a flash—no fire—then a cloud of smoke and debris and after that you see lumps of building falling back into places they didn't occupy before."

The Wing-Commander said our losses are mysterious sometimes—you don't know the reason why certain aircraft fail to return. Maybe one-third were due to *Flak*, one-third to engine trouble, one-third to night fighters—but nobody knows; it's all speculation. I asked him was there not danger of our machines colliding with one another when we send a vast number over the target. The reply is that in darkness you can put four times as many aircraft over a target as you could in daylight. Apparently, what the eye doesn't see . . .

The Group Captain told me an interesting anecdote of the last war. A machine of ours crashed between the lines. He and our doctor went out with our ambulance to bring the man in. Simultaneously, a German party arrived to capture him. An argument followed as to who should have him. Our pilot was not injured, but as the argument went on our doctor took out a bandage surreptitiously and swiftly wrapped it round the pilot's leg. He then pointed out the pilot was wounded and we *must* be allowed to take him in. And we did.

Group Captain on fighting: " It is really all timing—and a good deal of luck. More team work now, yes, but your good man will still get his prey." He has a phrase: " We're as fit as fleas."

In a cone of fire of 20 feet from a single automatic gun, only decimal 4 of one bullet stands a chance of hitting an aircraft flying through it at 300 miles an hour. The shooter must swing with his gun like swinging at a pheasant, to stand a reasonable chance of hitting.

I met to-day an officer of Hussars who, as he said, " fired with my own fair hand the first shot at the Italians in this war. It was on the Libyan frontier—we were cutting down telephones. I fired at an Italian staff car—and missed. Mussolini had said over the radio at 4 p.m. that he would begin the war at 11 a.m. next day. We decided to start in right away. Cutting telephones down isn't easy—you climb the damn' poles and get splinters in your thighs. When you cut one pole down the damn' thing bounces up and down, held up by the others; you've got to cut three poles down to do any good."

In the briefing room are two notices:

" Those enterprises are best which can be kept secret till the moment of fulfilment " (Machiavelli).

" B—— baffles brains."

October 16th, 1941.

It comes as a surprise to me to learn how many raids our air crews have carried out—I mean per man. A D.F.C. man I talked with to-day, whose last job was dropping a bomb weighing nearly 2 tons on Naples, said he's done fifty-nine raids: " You reach a peak of efficiency, then decline a bit, then rise to a peak again. I feel I can go on indefinitely." (But probably no man can do that.) For a pilot or member of air crew to have achieved fifty raids, twenty of them over Germany and the remainder out here, is fairly common. I don't think we give enough awards to these fine men—decorations cost almost nothing. Without a decoration, you cannot distinguish between a man who has spent all his time in an office in safety and one who on fifty occasions has taken his life in his hands. Personally, I would give a medal to every man who has taken part in fifty raids, and a bar to it when he has done a hundred. I've not yet met a pilot who has carried out a hundred, but I've run into several who are *determined* to get their century.

October 18th, 1941.

I've had the privilege of flying some 500 miles in a Wellington up to the forward landing ground one afternoon, and back the next morning. During the night the lads roared off to Benghazi. Our pilot was a tall, yellow-haired lad of twenty-two, who used to do some motor racing—a sergeant-pilot. He made a beautiful landing up in the desert. I remarked on it. The Australian rear-gunner (an officer) grinned and said: " It's the first time he's landed with bombs on. We didn't tell you before." But I should not have been worried—I've any amount of confidence in these lads. Our navigator was a Canadian from Toronto, our 2nd pilot an insurance inspector from Brighton—a regular international crew. A lad from Halifax, Yorkshire, and I engaged in a conversation on paper. I asked him how his best girl likes him flying. He wrote: " She doesn't. I tell her it's safe enough, but she doesn't believe me." I said that at all events flying men got beds and hot baths. He wrote back: " In the last push I didn't see so many hot baths or beds. I had four to six weeks under the stars when Tobruk was first cut off." I met a young pilot doing his fiftieth raid whose father was killed in the R.A.F. in 1938 and his uncle killed in the R.A.F. during the last war. Yet here he is doing his job quite calmly. He and another pilot joked about how they got through their entrance examination. The other lad said: "They asked me where Aden was. I replied, ' On the Black Sea '—I knew there was a colour in it somewhere." The pilot doing his fiftieth raid had had his aircraft hit three times. " Over Naples we thought the *Flak* would be light. But the fleet was in harbour. Oh, dear ! " On a dark night it's easier for searchlights to pick up an aircraft than when there's a good moon; dark nights make the job more tiring for the pilot, too.

On the way back we flew low over the sea and the sea raced towards us lined with a million horizontal streaks of silver. Suddenly the aircraft stank of burning oil (so I thought). I sniffed, but as nobody remarked on it I held my peace. Soon afterwards I realised it was not burning oil but the stink of cordite—the front gunner was doing a bit of practice firing at the sea.

A group captain not long ago flew to Benghazi and had to bale out on the return journey—came down in the desert. The lads are very tickled over this.

Some remarks:

" Anything near you ? "

" Not a sausage."

" What was that aircraft about 400 yards behind us on our way there ? "

" Must have been one of ours."

" But he wouldn't have his navigation lights on."

" *You'd* be surprised."

We've a young pilot at Malta who has specialised on sinking ships—he's risen from sergeant-pilot to squadron-leader in quick time; he's thought to have sunk or badly damaged twelve ships.

A major of Ack-Ack artillery flew to Benghazi the other night to see what enemy *Flak* is like. He said to me after he got back: " I hope we get closer to the enemy than they did to us." He was on the Isle of Dogs and in Bow during the London *Blitz*. He said: " It was all right being with the battery on the gun-site; rather enjoyed it—you make your own noise. But sitting in a flimsy office at H.Q.—I didn't like that at all."

A sergeant-pilot said to me, on the subject of sleeping: " I once slept through a crash—we took two ditches and a hedge and I never woke up. Somebody shook me—' Come on—she may go on fire.' "

Remark on Benghazi: " Somebody usually gets it [the *Flak*] and the rest of us get in for nothing."

Comments:

" Few more landings like that and she'll land herself."

" No—I was too high up—she'd have been O.K. with the bombs on."

Remark to me to-day: " Did you operate last night ? "

To-night we had a lively supper party—two group captains and a cavalry officer. The cavalry officer made a spirited attack on the Press—said you could buy any of our newspapers (meaning their opinion and

influence) if you had enough money. I hope I dealt suitably with him. I said: " I should like to observe you trying to buy the *Manchester Guardian* or the *Glasgow Herald* or the *Scotsman* or the *Yorkshire Post* or the *Sunday Times*, or several others I have in mind. And I should like to see you trying to buy me to write an article I believe to be false." Next day he apologised. As I told him, I am a strong critic of the Press myself, but we have several sorts of Press. Commonly our critics fall far below standards our best journalists and the best of our papers set themselves.

During our talk, the point was made that Russia will be a powerful trade competitor after the war—that that is inevitable, knowing how efficient in an engineering capacity she has proved herself.

Comment on Greece and Crete: " We ought to have concentrated on Crete and not sent aircraft to Greece. We got almost nothing away out of Greece. We couldn't give any air support worth mention, anyway. Longmore was over-persuaded by the Army."

Comment on a gunner: " Good fat, sturdy, stolid type, not too much imagination and a great tonic to those troubled with nerves." Another: " He'd give a severe headache to any Hun who stirred him out of his deceptive lethargy."

October 29th, 1941.

Our airmen who fly to Naples are tickled by the fact that they see three volcanoes on the way. Vesuvius is in action, with lava trickling down the sides. " It's like glowing coals on the mountain side with an occasional woof ! There's no smoke or big fire." At Palermo, a pilot said, you feel you are flying into a cliff 1,500 feet tall. " At night everything looks closer and higher than it really is." A smoke screen on a calm night is much more nuisance than when it is windy.

To-day I met a Welsh rear-gunner, formerly a ship's third officer, who shot down three enemy fighters in one engagement, thus: He was in his turret when they were attacked in daylight (during the Syrian campaign). Almost at once his turret was struck, partly shattered and his hydraulic system which works the turret and raises his two machine-guns to the required elevation, put out of action. He thereupon spat out his false teeth, top and bottom, and with his mouth seized the projection at the rear of the gun and thus controlled and lifted or depressed it. (This projection is cylindrical in shape and about an inch and a quarter in diameter; it is made of steel). Working thus, he shot down three enemy, all confirmed. He received serious wounds, eighteen in the legs and two in the stomach. The action lasted about twenty-five minutes. He said nothing of his wounds till the fight was over. He said to me: " I got in one or two wizard bursts. They shot all my flying kit away—an act of

God, it was, the whole thing. Everything came at us—armour piercing, incendiary, tracer, explosive. I didn't think we'd get away with it, but I thought, ' I'll get one or two of them first.' It's no use thinking about yourself; you don't last long if you do; you have to think of the others. Anyhow, nobody could have got us home but Digger (the Australian pilot). He's the best b—— pilot of all. Over Benghazi one night, I said down the phone to him, ' There's a fighter on our tail.' He said: ' Shoot the —— down '—just like that, and went on with his bombing." He said he thought we do more damage with machine-guns than with bombs and that he and his comrades " got away with it " by looking for trouble. One of his phrases, " I'm the eyes of the aircraft—Digger does what I tell him."

Another fine rear-gunner is not far short of my age—he has now carried out fifty-eight raids, nearly thirty of them over Germany. He fought in the last war as a fighter pilot, doing 900 hours' flying. He said: " I had to be in this war—I'd have felt a sort of inferiority otherwise—and if I'm in it I must be active. They keep trying to turn me into a schoolmaster [an instructor] and offer me higher rank, but I'd rather fly. I don't say I enjoy it, but I prefer it to being on the ground, and although I'm mixed up in it all, I can't help thinking how stupid the whole thing is—the war and the waste of it. The world was just running into an era of real prosperity, and now this." He said he finds the first part of the voyage very busy—he's got his guns to fix up, etc., " but I've developed by long practice the ability to slump down and relax completely without going to sleep—if anything happens I'm alert at once." He's a grand person. (I flew on a raid with him a day or two later.)

November 1st, 1941.

Two days ago I flew in one of our Wellington bombers to make a raid on enemy shipping in the harbours of Crete. The aircraft's name was G for George—a very fine machine, almost new; this was about her sixth raid. But the crew had done far more raids than that—the five of them averaged forty raids apiece and the rear-gunner, the flying officer I've mentioned before, who looks a regular mine host of a man, ruddy-faced, burly, deep voiced, as imperturbable as the rock of Gibraltar, had done fifty-seven raids. That puts my small adventure in its right proportion. In a sense, we were unlucky. Some of our brother aircraft found ships, but we didn't—we spent over an hour cruising round those Crete harbours and along the coast and not a solitary ship could we discover. There was an aerodrome as an alternative target, but a vast area of cloud obscured it. We were taking no chances, because the Cretans are friendly—it was ships or the aerodrome or nothing. For the moment we were nonplussed. Our captain, a grey-eyed lad of twenty-one, small,

clear-cut features, a tight little mouth, sat there at the controls, wearing his shorts with bare knees, looking very much a boy, except for a glint about the eye and that stubborn mouth, and he flew with one hand and fingered his chin thoughtfully with the other, as a student might. I was standing by him and I shouted in his ear, lifting his helmet to do it, " Let's go and bomb Bardia "—Bardia being an enemy port near Sollum a couple of hundred miles away. No difficulty in finding targets there—every man jack there is an enemy, every harbour device and every storehouse an enemy instrument and property. He grinned assent, and the navigator, a big brawny lad of twenty with a luxuriant moustache and looking like one of Cromwell's men-at-arms in his leather helmet, cocked up his thumb—to signify " Yes "—and off we went. And on Bardia we unloaded several thousand pounds weight of bombs. And we did it without a shot being fired at us. We'd had a lot of metal and explosive thrown up at us earlier in the night, especially at Heraklion, where we came down fairly low looking for those invisible ships, but during our actual bombing, we'd no opposition. I suppose we took them by surprise.

But I seem to be getting a long way ahead of myself. We had begun the real adventure that morning. We got our instructions early in the day, learnt where we had to go and incidentally that all the bombs had to be changed on the aircraft. The armourers did a fine job *there*, sweating in the sun and drinking tea to keep them hard at it. In our case the job was done by the rear-gunner and the captain—these two who might almost have been father and son, such was the disparity in their ages. At 11.30 we were summoned again for a final word of advice, and at noon we were ready to go. I'd been fitted with a parachute. Off we roared to the advanced landing base and on the way I spent some time sitting in the rear gun turret, for it was understood that in emergency I might have to do some shooting not from the rear turret, but the front one. You make yourself horizontal and pull yourself in by handholds in the roof; once you're in it's pretty comfortable, but lonely. With doors shut behind you, you feel like a bird in a cage. " How shall I know," I said, " whether the aircraft I see is enemy or ours ? " " Oh," said the rear-gunner, " you'll *know* when he shoots at you. Don't fire till he does, and don't fire, anyhow, till we tell you." " O.K.," I said, knowing it was extremely unlikely I should be called upon, and hoping I shouldn't, anyway. I had a look at the four guns amidships, with a swivelling chair to turn from one couple to the other. " I think I'd be more use here," I said. " I feel more at home." " All right," said the captain. " Over the target, I'll probably put the second pilot in the front turret." We'd a late lunch at the forward landing ground in a rough and ready desert mess—bully beef and raw onion and bread and tea or beer drunk from glasses sawn from beer bottles, and the next thing I knew we were in a truck racing down to the sea several miles off for a bathe, rear-gunner and captain well to the front. Back in camp, we'd another last word on wind and

cloud, a second mug of tea and just before dark we set off. I was wearing the captain's fur-lined jacket, the rear-gunner's trousers and flying boots —all these were going spare—and over them the parachute harness, and a leather helmet. I'd made myself a sandwich to eat later on, but, like a fool, I had put it in my tunic pocket under all the flying kit and it was now no more accessible than if it had been at the North Pole, where, indeed I felt ready to go, because for the first half-hour I roasted. I roasted alone in darkness in a sort of miniature railway tunnel that the interior of the Wellington had become. The rear-gunner was cut off in his turret and the navigator, wireless lad, and both pilots were cut off ahead by doors. I sat for a while and thought of all the things that could go wrong. Suppose the engines cut out and we fell in the sea? Next I looked out of the astral hatch and saw the engine exhausts flaring in red and blue and gold flame like a small blast furnace and thought: "Suppose we catch fire?" I flashed on my torch and looked at the mass of pipes and wires and rudder controls and thought: " I wonder how many of those can go wrong and allow us still to fly." And I wondered if any of us could bring the ship home, supposing the two pilots were wounded. Then I gave it up and wandered along to see how the captain was getting on. The navigator was busy over his charts and various instruments, as though in an office ashore, and the wireless lad was blissfully reading a thriller, and the captain was as nonchalant as though he'd been driving his sports car. So who was I to worry my head? These lads had done this job forty times apiece—the captain forty-seven times. I've forgotten to say that our internal telephone system had gone what they call " U.S.," but that didn't worry them either, for they'd arranged a code of flashes on the aircraft's lamp system designed for this emergency. So many flashes to tell the navigator to drop a drift flare, so many for a fighter on our tail. Time got over quite well what with the flashing lamps, and my watching stars reflected in the sea, and enjoying the moon and cloud effects and seeing the beacon lights as we neared Crete.

From time to time our youthful captain gave me a nudge. He nudged me to point out a firework display ahead—*Flak* over Heraklion, where some of our brethren were already busy—golden stars winking in the sky where shells burst, and a rising stream of golden and red balls. He nudged me again near the target to look at another Wellington a quarter of a mile to our left, a dark silhouette going past as though homeward bound. There were times when he did not need to nudge me—when the bursting shells beneath us gave me any jolt I required, or when he himself, in order to dodge a small group of searchlights that caught us and held us for four or five seconds, threw the aircraft into a lurching, drunken reel, rising and slipping and turning in that contortion that they drily call " evasive action." I have a belief that noise is a far greater contribution to fear than sight—explosions which are noiseless can seem picturesque and innocent. And most of the *Flak* we saw was of that

nature. It rose in bubbles, as though blown by a giant, beautifully coloured, appearing to rise slowly and sedately—though this was deceptive—and not especially to concern us. It was thus we searched the harbour at Heraklion, flew to Suda Bay and tried there, flew along the coast seeking those elusive ships. Once, another Wellington swept past our tail, making a turn, closer than we liked, and once I thought we were assuredly hit. For a while no shells had seemed to be near us, life had been quiet, and then, suddenly, out of the blue a terrific metallic crack under our starboard engine. The aircraft staggered for a second, and I listened most intently to the tune of that engine which seemed to change and then go back to its old note—and we went on as before. The captain gave me a wry grin and shouted that was damned close. The curious thing is that the moments of extreme danger come and are gone so fast that you've hardly time to be frightened and, as for me, it was all so new and interesting that I was absorbed. And, again, I had moments when I appeared to be outside myself and outside the whole business, just sitting aloof and watching it, a spectator who couldn't be harmed. We had now been for some time over Crete, and our course was set for Bardia. Our navigator, this jovial, mediæval-looking figure, bent over his charts again and predicted the exact time we'd be at Bardia. I thought that prediction highly optimistic and was amused at his meticulous timing, but he was almost dead-on. He flashed his torch in my face to rouse me just before we arrived and then he went and lay down on his stomach over the bomb-aimer's window—for he drops the bombs as well as navigates. The port of Bardia looked as quiet as though the dove of peace had descended upon it—one or two lights or beacons burned—I can't tell you what they were. Our captain throttled back his engine and we flew slowly over. Nothing interfered with us, not a shot was fired at us. Four tiny blue eyes burned on the bomb sight, and on a dial near the captain a red light and a green one popped in and out to direct him to turn right or left as the bomb-aimer wished. And, moment after moment, we dropped a bomb. But I did not hear them explode—you see a flash—that is all. For you in the aircraft, dealing out destruction, it is a silent bombing. We flew on home, the moon rose fuller and more silver, throwing her beams on the sea, the captain, after a good many hours at the wheel, had a drink of water and his young face relaxed a trifle. At our base the landing flare path was like a small string of stars laid on the earth and we touched lightly down, brought safely back by our captain's strong, lithe hands. " You must be tired," I said. " No," he said. " I'm O.K." And he smiled. We trudged across the desert to the underground operations room, told our tale, walked across to the Mess and drank beer while the hot tea cooled. Banter flew about: " Was that you, you old devil, coming past our tail ? " " Did you see that mysterious fire out at sea ? " " Bombed Bardia, did you ? That was a good stooge, anyway."

But when I turned in two hours later, two of our aircraft had not yet

come back—and the captain of one was making his sixtieth raid. That's what war is like. And now, as I jot this down in comfort and safety, that band of brothers I flew with are off on another hazardous adventure. What is one to say of them? It would take the tongue of a Shakespeare to do them justice.

November 2nd, 1941.

My mind runs over the flight I made—how our young pilot was like King Harry's soldiers—straining at the leash. " Let's get cracking," he said once or twice. On the return journey from advanced base to rear base, he broke the record—took us up to 9,000 feet to do it. For about six hours previous, he had sat in a chair waiting for dawn to come. I was luckier—the doctor at advanced base is my aquiline friend who sailed out with me; he carted me off to the sick bay, got two blankets from an ambulance and made me comfortable. At rear base we got a hot bath and a magnificent breakfast—the best bacon I've had since I reached Africa. Our pilot had, in all, three breakfasts—one at advanced base and two back here. An extra one was cooked by mistake, so he tackled it—he'd five eggs in all. He then went to bed and slept till 6 p.m. I was up by lunchtime, restless, and in the afternoon I swam in the lake. How warmly one feels towards those with whom one has taken part in an adventure of this sort! What a job it is for a lad of twenty-one. The aircraft weight is some 15 tons, the cost about £40,000, and six lives in his hands. No doubt who was the " boss "—it was the grey-eyed lad. He and the rear-gunner have been together for some time. Pilots and rear-gunners like to stick—once they know one another's ways. They were all most helpful to me—regarded me as an old gentleman who must be looked after. As I sat near the captain in the machine making notes, he kept switching a small light on for me to see by. In the odd moments over the target, when things quietened down—danger was spasmodic, came and went—I produced two or three times a couple of sweets, and he and I each had one. I stood alongside him, occasionally getting on my toes to see better. Then I'd sit down on some small steps and look down at the ground through the bomb-aimer's hatch. The searchlights shone blue as sapphires on the ground and their light occasionally came into the aircraft. I'm amused by the lads' use of the word " stooge." " We had a long stooge over the sea " or " I was the stooge—got all the *Flak*." " Are you stooging or working? " I felt lonely sitting in the rear-turret as we flew up to advanced base. I was fastened in and occasionally the turret juddered in air pockets (or whatever they were). I asked V. how long he sits there. He said: " I *have* sat there for nine hours."

I wondered as we flew onwards whether any of us were thinking, " We're doing this to crush Nazism." Probably not. One is so engrossed in the technical work that the reason for it is out of mind.

On this journey I shoved cotton wool in my ears. A few days ago when I flew the 500 miles I had neither cotton wool nor flying helmet, and I was partially deaf for hours. When I met my doctor friend he said: " You're as deaf as a post. You mustn't fly for a month or you'll go really deaf." I cannot yet hear my watch tick. I've sprained my right hand, too, in wrestling with my flying kit, struggling to reach the sandwich in my pocket. (I never did reach it.) Flexible pipes of about 3 inches diameter bring warm air into the machine. At one time I had a current of warm air running past my backside and a current of cold air past my face.

I heard a fine rear-gunner say he wouldn't be bound by rules; he'd certainly let fly at an enemy if he got a good target. Really brave men are usually rather intractable—they shoulder their way through. One notices it when they drive in traffic on the roads.

Human nature is very curious—bodily needs can override much. On the way back after bombing Bardia, I was thinking much less of the damage we had done than of whether hot tea would be laid on (as we say) when we got back, and of how V. was faring in the tail turret. Neither he nor our captain ever drinks anything but water on their flights.

I went to bed at 2 a.m., but at 4 a.m. I was wide awake and had difficulty in getting off to sleep again. Just before we turned in, an aircraft came over the landing ground. We thought it was one of ours that had been delayed. " Thank God ! " said the doctor. Then: " No. That's not a Wimpie." He could tell by the engine roar.

November 3rd, 1941.

I've been talking with a Wing Commander who describes this bombing as a " wizard game," but more exciting than Rugby. " Your life doesn't count," he said, speaking with a flash in his dark-grey eyes. (This sounds theatrical, but he was perfectly serious.) He described the target at Benghazi as about the size of Twickenham Rugby Ground. " About fifty yards off, *Flak* sounds like a dog growling with a bone in its throat; when it's near it's like a whip cracking." He said: " I hear lads saying, ' Christ ! Do you know, I haven't operated for three nights ? ' " He thinks half of our surprising immunity from losses is because of the fine quality of our aircraft—they'll stand a lot of punishment. Flying, he said, becomes automatic. Some men do their best landings when tired out after a twelve hours' journey—they land the aircraft as automatically as one walks about.

The enemy desert rations are highly spoken of. They have a tin containing all kinds of stuff—bread, meats, etc. Each package is wrapped separately in cellophane. This applies to their soldiers' rations, too. They

issue to them a package of bread, each slice separately wrapped in paper, which keeps it fresh and moist—it obviates waste and keeps the food appetising. I remember living at Le Transloy in 1916 (winter) for three days on German iron rations. Their water-bottles had screw tops (better than ours) and were filled with weak coffee.

November 4th, 1941.

The flat where Forrest and I live in Cairo has been taken over by a Polish officer, formerly in the Polish diplomatic service; a man of charm. Willie has been telling us of the Polish officer in Edinburgh who stood outside a fruiterer's shop. He wanted to buy some apples and didn't know what to say. He called an urchin to him and pointing to the apples, inquired what he ought to ask for. He got his answer and walked into the shop. What the surprised shopkeeper heard the Polish officer say was: " Gie us a poond o' apples."

The Germans are not always so efficient as we give them credit for. Two days after they invaded Poland, the Polish Embassy in Warsaw could telephone to their Embassy in Berlin—and did so ! I said: " Maybe the Germans left the line so that they could listen-in to what you said." He replied: " No. They simply forgot it. So soon as they remembered, it was cut."

He has smoked since he was eight years old. He smokes partly to create acid in his stomach (or system), in which he is deficient. He said: " The Jesuits can smoke if the doctor says they need the extra acid smoking causes—not otherwise." (As to this, I don't know.) Speaking of the Russian liking for tea-drinking, he said: " They describe how much they drink on a certain day by saying: ' To-day I drown three towels.' The tea makes them pour with sweat, and they wipe it off—towels get very wet. Hence the saying."

November 7th, 1941.

Two nights ago I dined with one of our generals—a very likeable, unassuming man; as far removed from a stage general as one could imagine —once took a year's leave to qualify as a barrister; knows music and books extremely well; agrees there's too much old school tie, for which as such, he hasn't any use. His grandmother was a Lancashire woman; he says he'd choose north Lancashire to anywhere else as a place to live. Thinks he'd like to go into Parliament after the war. I hope he does. We shall need all the good men we can find. By the way, the utmost our War Office expected to extricate from Dunkirk was 45,000 men. We got out seven or eight times as many.

I've been having some interesting encounters resulting from an article I've written for the *Sunday Times* asserting our Government and our

armed forces aren't within measurable distance of realising the importance of propaganda. What gave rise to it was a German film we were shown this week, showing their invasion of Russia, sinkings by U-boats, etc.—designed to impress on folk the weight and ruthlessness and efficiency of the German war machine. The film succeeds in doing that. To that extent, it's as good propaganda for use among our own people as for use by Germany—it will diminish any complacency that still exists. But it hammers home, too, how lacking we are in anything of the sort. I don't know of any British good factual films that show our fine soldiers, sailors and airmen fighting—one or two fictional films, but none factual. I've said in my article that it should be axiomatic that wherever our fighting men are engaged, there cameramen and writers should be welcomed. But that, on the contrary, the official attitude is that to allow a journalist to take part in a hazardous enterprise is to bestow on him an unbounded favour. In my view, we ought to enlist young writers, artists, and camera-men in the armed forces to a far greater degree than we do to perform their professional jobs and thus cover adequately every picturesque or major fight that occurs. Most of the Army's " conducting officers " would then be needless. At the moment the R.A.F. generally speaking, overplays its hand regarding publicity, and the Army and Navy steadily underplay theirs—so that if the R.A.F. seems to fall short in any of its enterprises, the other arms are more critical than they would otherwise be. All the same, the Army and Navy might well take a leaf or two from the R.A.F.'s book. It happens, too, that in this striving after favours the Americans come off better than the British—so anxious are we to please America. I added to the message as a postscript : " I suggest we should be far more generous in awarding decorations to our men—in particular, every man who has done fifty raids over enemy territory should be decorated. Men who've been mentioned in despatches ought to have a badge or ribbon to wear. The whole subject of awards needs investigation—at present there's little distinguishing between civilians dressed as warriors and the men who've returned from Tobruk or are air crews or have been risking sea perils. Let us know who's who."

This message was sent to H.Q., R.A.F., where it was passed (I believe) by Air Marshal Tedder. Randolph Churchill asked me to discuss it with him—he's as eager to get better facilities for correspondents as I am and is working hard to that end. He disagrees with my solution—believes better facilities can be got under our existing method and that that will do the trick. Knowing how old-fashioned so many generals, etc., are, I doubt it. He said: " Do you mind if I get somebody else to put the opposite point of view ? " I said, " Not at all. Do whatever you like."

So faulty have our arrangements been for getting stuff home that the pictures of our capture of Benghazi did not reach England till after the Germans had recaptured the town ! Those of the surrender of Aosta

were extremely late. When the B.B.C. sent out a machine for recording talks, etc., it got to Suez and there stuck—I believe the authorities told the man who had brought it from England that at Suez he must part company with it; they would take it to Cairo within three days. After three months, it had not arrived. (The journey takes two hours by road.) One bit was found halfway to Port Said, another bit somewhere else, but the main part of the machine (it ultimately proved) had been sent back to Britain as part of the personal luggage of an officer's wife ! It was a year later before the machine finally got to its right destination.

Recently there was a period of four weeks during which not a single photograph of our Navy at work had left Alexandria; yet the work of maintaining Tobruk never ceases.

Yesterday I played golf at Gezira; the day was a griller, hotter, I think, than when I arrived in August. Not for sixty years has Cairo known such November days. Among the clubs I borrowed was a doughty No. 7—a very long and strong one. It served me well. Twice when my situation was hopeless, it plopped one within holing distance. Over a drink afterwards, I was introduced to a museum curator who is a character. He once had a favourite cat which somebody shot maliciously. He discovered the man by whose orders the murder had been committed, went to see him, found he had gone away for a fortnight, made a parcel of the dead cat, impressed on the murderer's native servant that this parcel must not on any account be disturbed and left it to await his return. He possesses a parrot, too, which is fluent in every Arabic oath. One day the parrot was lost. The need arose to prove it was his; the unmatched stream of Arabic oaths placed that beyond question.

Two nights ago Forrest and I went down to Maadi to see *Night must Fall* in the recreation tent; Okely, a friend of O.'s, is business manager for the play. Danny was played by a signaller of twenty-one, who toured in the part in Britain—he gave a first-rate, mature and confident portrayal of this Welsh murderer-exhibitionist. I was asked to speak after the play, but didn't—speeches from the stage are almost always a mistake; the audience wants to go home.

Last night our Polish acquaintances asked me to go with them to see the Pyramids by moonlight. We walked round the biggest pyramid. Somebody said that a million times its height would reach the sun. I don't know. The moonlight was superb—the great yellow ball, at one point, seemed to rest on the pyramid's apex. From the far side, the stones of the towering, sloping wall were tinted in the brilliant light with something akin to rose and violet, as are the hills in Syria in certain lights. The Polish cavalry officer who drove us goes to Tobruk in ten days' time. He's " on a course " with officers from Tobruk; all they think about, he said, is getting back there.

This Polish officer and his wife are most engaging folk, and their friends also. We had a Polish major to lunch who was the last officer to leave Poland with his men, a great authority on the campaigns of Napoleon. He believes in equality of payment, and insists on drawing the same pay as typists in his office. (He doesn't smoke or drink.)

A Polish officer in Tobruk has recently spent two days among, or near, the enemy. It is told of this man that he was captured in Poland and escaped in this way: he began an argument with his German guard on the relative merits of Polish and German steel helmets. The German guard took off his own helmet to examine it—an extremely natural thing to do—whereupon the Polish officer smote him violently on his bare head, and while the guard was on the floor, escaped.

I've been reading Gort's despatches on the fighting which led to Dunkirk. Written with immense restraint as they are, and severely sub-edited as no doubt they have been, they reveal how often the French failed us. They reveal, too, how uneasy Gort was on the score of our inadequate equipment—by May 10th, 1940, armour-piercing shells for field guns had not been provided, and a shortage of guns existed in some anti-tank regiments of the Royal Artillery. The shortage of almost every nature of ammunition was such that stocks in France were not nearly enough to permit of the rates of expenditure laid down for sustained operations before the war. By May 12th the Fighter Group of the Air Component (attached to the Army) was down to fifty planes, and although he, Gort, had asked for four fresh squadrons, only one had arrived. It is plain that we had not anticipated the quantity of engineer stores we should need for the defensive system we began to create, that problems of building aerodromes were greater than had been anticipated, that the staff for dealing with wireless intelligence was inadequate, that despite (in the early period) the absence of battles, the short supply of officers caused him concern, that the existing war establishment of an infantry battalion, *which was not designed for Continental warfare* (as he writes), had called for modification. So the record goes on. One may wonder whether, if he had resigned in the autumn of 1939 as a protest against our slowness in providing adequate equipment, we should have been in a better situation when the fighting started. As it was, to meet the emergency, men and weapons were scratched together in a fashion at once admirable and pitiable. In the defence of St. Pol, even a mobile bath unit was roped in. The 23rd Division, sent to occupy the line of the Canal du Nord, had no artillery, and signals and administrative units in no more than skeleton form. Its training was far from complete. When the fighting began, we had (he says) one regiment of armoured cars of an obsolete pattern, two battalions of infantry tanks armed

(except for twenty-three Mark II tanks) with one machine-gun each, and seven cavalry regiments armed with light tanks. Writing of Dunkirk, he says that, owing to a misunderstanding, the personnel of certain anti-aircraft units had been embarked instead of being retained for defence of the port. (Napoleon once said, speaking of orders: "Be clear, and the rest will follow.")

I have thought from the first that Gort did as well as anybody could have done, short of men and material as he was, let down by the French and Belgians as he was, and having marched his armies into Belgium (as the Germans no doubt wished). The decision to go in was not his, but that of higher authorities, but, of course, he may have thought it wise—I don't know. Once, however, we were invited in by King Leopold, it's difficult to see how we could have refused.

I've been reading Belloc's *Napoleon*. In Belloc's view, Josephine de Beauharnais, six years or so Napoleon's senior and having both been married and had several lovers already (she has resemblances to Nelson's Emma), set herself to hook Bonaparte as soon as she sensed his rising star. She (on Belloc's presentation) seems never to have loved Bonaparte, although he certainly developed a passionate love for her. Napoleon's awkwardnesses as a young man, this pale, thin, short man—his inability to speak half as well as he could write, his narrow escapes from disaster (he had nineteen horses shot under him and once during an assault fell off a bridge and was nearly drowned)—these emerge clearly. From the time he was forty he seems to have had his periods when lethargy overtook him, preventing him from reaching decisions soon enough and, on occasion (as in Russia) pushing him to make wrong ones. He died of cancer at fifty-three.

November 9th, 1941.

To-day I set off for the desert to be ready for the offensive. A colleague travelling with me was ambushed a year ago—shot up by Italians. His driver was wounded and his conducting officer also. They got away without anybody being killed and next day returned to the scene. He had lost his wrist watch during the mêlée, but now he found it again—and it was still going. None of them had a field-dressing at the time—which reminds me that I have none now, though I possess a ninepenny A.R.P. first-aid dressing. I fear we correspondents are an improvident lot.

My colleague was mentioned in despatches for his work in that ambush, but he has nothing to show for it. If he had another medal, he could wear an oak-leaf on it—but he has no such medal. By the way, an Australian correspondent swam some distance under fire to rescue a wounded soldier. One or two of his comrades wrote a piece about his

gallantry. The correspondent was later told that he would in all likelihood have been given a decoration, but that was not now possible, because he had had what they called " pre-mention." This strikes me as typical British smugness.

November 10th, 1941.

Two or three of us set off to-day for the forward area—I want to contact Brigadier Gatehouse to hand to him grape-fruits and various delicacies a friend of his has entrusted to me. We lunched at the transit camp at Mersa Matruh and heard how a New Zealand sergeant is doing miraculous work bringing our men out of enemy-occupied territory. An Anzac in such territory, grateful for being kept by a native family, conceived the notion of starting a laundry to repay them. This laundry is now a roaring success in the basement, and the family who have befriended him are getting wealthy by washing German officers' clothes !

My tent companion, Harold Denny, of New York, says the letters we use for things being out of service—U.S.—will have to be changed when the United States comes right into the war. (He wears " U.S. War Correspondent " on his shoulder, which is funny, in view of our now common use of U.S.) Ten nationalities, all helping us, ate lunch together in this transit camp the other day. Some U.S.A. officers are keen to be gunners in their tanks in the coming battle.

We had rain this morning. It has turned cold and I'm now wearing battle-dress.

A U.S.A. correspondent said to me to-day: " I never mention the British Navy now, because if I do it takes so long to get the message past the Censor that I miss the editions. I described the evacuation of Crete two days before the official statement, but my story reached London two days *after* the official statement. So the British Navy doesn't exist any more, so far as I am concerned."

We had quite a job finding the Brigadier, and got lost, as usual. You can only find your way by driving on a compass bearing, and checking up your mileage carefully on the car's indicator. Ran into the workshop unit, whose captain said drily: " There's so much stuff in the desert now you have to book your seat." Von Rommel has done singularly little strafing of our material. Reminds me of how we were permitted to enter Belgium in May, 1940, without any opposition.

Last night I slept in my diminutive tent—bought for £5 in Cairo. At its highest point it's about 4 feet 6. It holds my small wooden and canvas bed and, indeed, last night it held a companion, too, lying on his valise

without the framework of a bed. Keeps off the dew and wind. I wonder how it will withstand the rain ?

Mr. Atkins is showing his ingenuity by draining his shaving and washing water through a pail of sand and using it twice over.

I hear of a new mine detector we've invented—for telling us when we are approaching these surface land mines with which both we and the enemy guard our positions.

For the first time in history we have a British armoured corps.

November 13th, 1941.

Amusing to see how our lads have stuck up goalposts in the midst of this concentration of transport and war material. A garage proprietor would think the desert to-day a paradise of possible work for him—and work he would get, too, for the manner in which vehicles can go wrong is extensive.

To-day I swam in the sea.

Some desultory bombing of my neighbourhood last night and one of our night fighters went up; an enemy bomber was seen rushing out to sea with an engine flaming.

The Times correspondent here succeeded Norman Ebbutt in Berlin. So that he knows the Germans. I asked him what the remedy is—how are we to deal with the Germans after the war ? He replied " I can't think." He thought the dangers inherent in spreading them all over the world greater than those inherent in leaving concentrated in the middle of Europe, They used to say to him in Berlin: " You're mad to give your guarantee to Poland. You can't fight—you've nothing to fight with. You *had* twelve anti-aircraft guns, but you sent them to Singapore."

General Willoughby Norrie, who commands our Armoured Corps, came over to our small encampment to see us last night and had a whisky and water out of an enamelled cup—he's a fresh-complexioned man, white clipped moustache, greenish trousers, and a lamb's-wool coat—every inch a British general; genial, grey-eyed, cool. Randolph Churchill asked me to-day what I thought of him. I said it was hard to say—he looked all right. How can you tell at a first meeting whether a man has brains ? Churchill said Norrie was his first Brigadier in the year before the war. He (Churchill) quoted somebody as saying that in the old days you found an able man and made him a general; now you make a man a general and hope to God he turns out to be an able man.

H., who knows Russia well, says it's impossible to imagine how cold Russia can be—half an hour of it is enough to invigorate you for the whole day. (What then of forty-eight half-hours in one day ? Do you

blow up?) He spent three winters in Germany, but Germany is as nothing compared with Russia for cold.

I got the medical orderly this morning to give me an ounce of castor oil to try to rid me of this stomach trouble.

A letter to me quotes a man from Tobruk saying: " I haven't been to the lavatory for fourteen days, so they evacuated me on a destroyer." With the comment: " Why did they need a destroyer to do that job? "

November 14th, 1941.

X. says he went on a bombing raid to Benghazi, because he was on the edge of a nervous breakdown—" and going worked like a charm. I've been all right since."

B. is writing a cable about the elusive offensive. He's made a bet of £5 with M. that the offensive doesn't begin in the near future. He says the hidden springs in U.S.A. to keep America out of the war are terrific. " America is keeping out of this war in a big way."

Churchill consulted Richard Mowrer and me to-night on whether he should circularise the correspondents asking whether they would wish him to make alterations in their dispatches supposing faulty communications had caused such delays that they had grown out-of-date or supposing they appeared rather misleading owing to the picture in one particular sector being unbalanced having regard to the war news as a whole. Would they like him, moreover, to add, in place of any such excised passage, a piece of up-to-the-minute news which he might have and which might fit in harmoniously with the rest of the story?

We said we saw no harm in asking the correspondents for their views, which would probably vary a lot. In my own case, I said I didn't mind being out-of-date, as I would date my despatch. I'd be glad to be toned down if I were too optimistic, having regard to the situation as a whole; but I wasn't agreeable to being toned up. I was agreeable to having a later item of news being added on a subject I was writing on, but on no other. I added that this arrangement applied to Churchill only, to this operation only, that I might rescind it at any time, and that in no sense must it be regarded as a precedent by any censor or propaganda chief in the future. And that I was glad Churchill had raised the subject. I am sure he is doing his best, but it's a tricky business.

November 15th, 1941.

I found myself to-day sharing a car with a young man who had no shoes and wore shorts and pullover. His hair was rather matted, his legs bruised—proved to be a Canadian flying officer of the R.A.F., aged

twenty-five, who's just swum six miles in the Mediterranean and walked a further fifty miles barefoot to safety. He said: " It was midday. I was twenty-five thousand feet up when I noticed the engine was rough and no oil showing on the gauge. I came down; the engine smoked a lot, then at a thousand feet the engine caught fire. At two hundred feet above the sea, I jumped out. My Irvine flying suit of fur-lined leather took me under water among bits of floating wreckage that were remains of the plane, and I was fifteen minutes getting clear and blowing up the inflated belt I wore. I found I'd got it on too tight and that made it difficult. Then, in underpants and shirt, I set off to swim to some rocks I could see three miles off—the portable dinghy in the parachute didn't work. I didn't know I could swim so far—I did it mostly on breast or back. That swim took me about three hours and I got pretty cold. I crawled out exhausted and, later on, made a hole for myself in the sand and dozed off through the night, but didn't sleep much—it was too damned cold. Next morning I waded in again and started the next swim, also three miles, to shore. This time I tried to tie the shirt round my head, but lost it, so I got to shore in just my underpants. On the rocks I'd waved like mad to a Blenheim, but they didn't see me. I lay down ashore and when I had rested a while started to walk east—I walked mostly in the clear, beautiful shallow water, and how I wished I could drink some of it ! Presently I found some old canvas and tied that round my feet and I got an old pyjama jacket that had been washed up and put that on, and a piece of towel to tie round my head. I began to ache and get sore and started to look on each leg and arm as a separate entity, and when my right leg ached I thought: ' I must find some way to give this poor old sod a rest.' I tried sucking pebbles to quench my thirst, but it didn't do much good, yet I wasn't as thirsty or hungry as you'd think—you seem to go into a kind of coma. That night I scooped another hole in the sand and next morning found I wasn't quite so thirsty—my body seemed to have absorbed some of the dew—a South African tells me that's what happens. I must have opened about twenty washed-up tins along that beach—I did that with a knife I found—but not one held water. There was petrol and all sorts of stuff. I saw about twenty mines washed up, too. All this time I hadn't seen a soul, but after fifty miles a reccer (reconnaissance) car came past and I waved, but they thought I was just a chap going for a bathe and took no notice at first. When I was taken aboard, and through the defences, they blindfolded me. Then I got my first drink—I drank about half a gallon of water—well, perhaps not quite so much. It was water I wanted—nothing else. No, I didn't think much when I was swimming—I was too intent on getting ashore and thought ' the devils won't get me now.' This is about the first real crash I've had in four years—I hadn't baled out before and I don't want to bale out again either. It'll take something to get me in the air again for a while."

November 16th, 1941.

Last evening General Cunningham, who is in command of this offensive (under Auchinleck), received us in his underground room. We trailed across the white desert in moonlight—sand so white that, in company with odd tents, the scene looked Arctic. Beside me walked Fred Bayliss, who is a trifle lame from jumping out of an aircraft with the parachuters the other day and hurting his back in the process. While waiting for Cunningham, they brought us a modest whisky and soda in a pint-glass. Cunningham shook hands with all of us—over twenty, all told. He then leaned his back against the wooden side of the room and talked. He is a florid man—white moustache, blue eyes, rather short. Put him in civilian clothes and he'd look like a country doctor. He's a bachelor and has always lived on his pay—said to be one of our few generals who never went to the Staff College.

He said our boys' tails are right up—a fact which gave him much satisfaction. He had no plan except to go into Libya and take up positions —then von Rommel would have to act and on Rommel's actions our own would depend.(This did not strike me as genius, but I may be wrong.) He added: " I am not trying to fox you—there is no plan beyond that." The Navy, he said, has already done some bombarding and has sunk the only tug at Bardia. I asked him if he could tell us what the enemy strength is. He replied that the Italians have five ordinary divisions, plus two motorised and one armoured. The Germans have two armoured divisions, but a German armoured division is not of the strength of a British one. In addition, there are some five German infantry battalions. He said: " The enemy have more bodies, but not as much heart."

Later, one of our chief Intelligence officers said to me: " If the enemy had gone back, withdrawn, six weeks ago, we should have been done."

Cunningham made it plain our objective is to destroy the enemy armoured divisions—territory doesn't matter much. (A marked change of outlook from the last war.) He didn't think the enemy could get many planes from Russia. Asked if the sinking of enemy convoys in the Mediterrranean had been a great help, he smiled and said, " Yes," adding that he had sent congratulations to his brother.

Randolph Churchill had suggested we should not ask too-awkward questions, as Cunningham had small experience of the Press and might get scared. So two or three of us had been deputed to ask a question each. But Cunningham appeared very ready to help. He was asked if sandstorms would hinder us. He said that, apart from the actual fighting, they might help us.

November 17th, 1941.

Randolph (it seems desirable to call him this to distinguish him from his father) is amusing and well-informed (not unnaturally). He told me

of a Lord Chief Justice who learned of his own resignation only by seeing it on a placard as he drove to the Law Courts. He rang up the then Prime Minister in a considerable stew. " Ah ! " said the P.M. " But don't you remember—I have your resignation in my safe. You signed it when I appointed you nine months ago." (The L.C.J. was but a stop-gap.)

He expressed criticisms of newspapers in general which I share. He is running a *World Press Review* which is very open-minded and prints a lot of critical stuff. One issue holds Mrs. Ayrton Gould's article from the *Daily Herald*, " Who gets the fish ? "—an attack on Woolton much after my own heart, since I had been regularly attacking him for a year before I came out here. The *World Press Review*, by the way, was burnt in at least one officers' mess here because it is too frank and radical. A fair number of officers have written in to it protesting against the articles it uses.

November 18th, 1941.

This is the day of the offensive. At supper last night it was announced that the Monarch had sent a message to the troops—something about fighting for freedom, home and liberty—not putting " home " last, it was mischievously said, in case it might make them think too much of home. The King's message says this battle will rank with Blenheim or Waterloo—which strikes me as a bit premature. However, let's hope so.

At 9.30 last night lights were flickering in the sky over Mersa Matruh —thought to be bombing. Earlier I had walked by the sea and saw in the sky—a dirty brown sky like a trawler's sail—a flying horse and a man behind in a chariot. The chariot vanished and became an eagle with wings, an eagle partially hooded. What does this mean, my companion and I asked one another. I said: " I'm thinking of those lads who'll not see the sky to-morrow night." I thought of the Brigadier in his spotted neckerchief, too.

I had to get up at 5 a.m. The sky over the sea was flickering in great white and yellow flashes. I thought it might be a naval bombardment, but it was silent, like sheet lightning. At 7 a.m. I was awakened by rain drumming on the tent and by thunder and lightning. It rained till after 9 a.m.

R. talks of holding up the aircraft bringing despatches and censoring them and then sending the aircraft on. I said: " Why not a flying censor working in the aircraft ? "

I'm told of Evelyn Waugh, who was in Crete and dive-bombed there, saying (apropos the continued dive-bombing): " The Germans have no restraint—they spoil everything."

My stomach is not right yet, but the twelve visits a day are now reduced to three or four. I was thankful not to be out in the open when

the rain pelted down. One would think it impossible for me to lose weight, but I have succeeded. I feel as though I have been kicked in the midriff by a mule.

A group of Australian correspondents has returned from the forward area—they were drowned out, found pots and pans floating past them.

At lunchtime R. announced: " There's a stop on everything—we are back to double censorship, and all our work goes for nothing." This is H.Q.'s doing and is wonderful in our sight, as the psalmist says. I had remained at headquarters to ensure sending one or two messages the first day or two (as distinct from getting lost in a forward area), but it avails me nothing. I walked down to the sea at 4 p.m.—it was blowing hard, the sea rough with lots of spray and the water a lovely colour.

I hear that five groups of Germans came down in five flying boats from Athens—came ashore near El Daba (behind me) in rubber boats. Nine of them surrendered to one Sudanese. We found two mines on the railway and removed them. The other sixteen Germans are not yet accounted for.

Our Corps H.Q. is now thirty-five miles inside enemy territory.

November 19th, 1941.

To-day we drove forward to battle headquarters; might have been an English day in May or late September—dull, cloudy, gleams of pale sun on the horizon.

My companion is fifty-nine and a half years old and is somewhat ill, getting over stomach trouble and malaria. Pretty gallant of him to be here. He's lost his shaving brush. Says this is a queer war—doubts if we should be attacking—better to have waited for them to attack, he thinks.

It's thought the rainstorm assisted us more than the enemy—that his terrain has suffered the more, bogging tanks and sweeping one or two bridges away.

Broadly speaking, the German 21st Armoured Division is in the north-east region of this battlefield, which is several thousand square miles in extent, and their 15th Division south of Tobruk. The 21st, or elements of it, perhaps its transport, is moving towards Tobruk and we bomb it as it proceeds. An American Flying Fortress has bombed Derna. Our Beaufighters have done deadly work. Indeed, we've met little enemy opposition in the air as yet. Not a single plane has been over our lines.

To-night we visited Air Vice-Marshal Conyngham in his desert caravan. We set off in the dark, guided by Randolph, who wore a white

Hebron shepherd's coat (leather one side, sheep's wool the other). I said, chaffing him, " You're a good man to follow to-night, if you never were before." Conyngham also had one of these white coats on—we shall have desert fashions before long. His caravan is first-rate—a good bed with sheets turned down (three of us sat on it) carpet on the floor, a desk with telephone, a chair or two. Imagine an outsize first-class sleeping car on a train, and you won't be far wrong. Conyngham looks about forty-seven, good deal of hair turning grey, clean-shaven, much " charm," which he can lay on and off as a politician does, an excellent talker and fond of talking. He was very pleased with the situation—thought we'd taken the enemy completely by surprise. We had, he said, been sending many convoys down to Siwa and Giarabub and it was from there (our authorities think) von Rommel expected the attack. (One wonders if this is so, remembering our large concentrations over the desert.) He described the speed with which we have occupied forward landing grounds. For example, we had a landing-ground with three or four aircraft on it. The enemy came over and took a look, and flew off. An hour later we had 350 aircraft on that landing ground and the enemy knew nothing of it. He said: " For three weeks we rehearsed our tactics, getting up-to-date. Building up our larger fighter force was the chief thing we had to do." He spoke warmly of the co-operation between R.A.F. and sappers in preparing airfields, and of the Army defending them. We've been dropping spikes on their airfields, spikes which mingle with the dust and destroy their tyres. They were already hard-up for tyres and eagerly took the tyres off any British machines they salvaged

Conyngham spoke of the enemy's ability, supposing he exerts all his energy, to pump into North Africa 400 tons of supplies a day by air alone from, say, Greece. Hitler has a thousand obsolescent planes turned into carrying aircraft. Moreover, he can replace a destroyed aircraft in three days whereas it takes us weeks. A number of our pilots who ferry aircraft across Africa west to east get malaria.

The telephone rang—it was Air Marshal Tedder speaking from Cairo. When the talk was finished, Conyngham said: " He can ring me up in two minutes—he from his bed to me in mine. It's as clear as talking to you. Isn't that awful? " And he laughed.

He said we've captured ten more of the Germans who landed by boat near El Daba; they surrendered to two Egyptians, a cause for some hilarity.

" So far," said Conyngham, " the *Luftwaffe* has been grounded."

Conyngham turned to Churchill, speaking of our living arrangements and said: " Can't you soften your heart and give them a tent? " (We had been told that even a bivvie tent was doubtful—would draw enemy bombing—I'm the only correspondent who has provided himself with one. The rest sleep under the stars—dew is heavy and nights cold.)

November 20th, 1941.

Randolph tells me that his father is looking for "fighting generals." (I like the way he refers to his father objectively as "Winston." Just occasionally he calls him the "Prime Minister.")

Of one deposed general it is said, he "chose generals like electing men to the Athenæum."

I watched some Blenheim pilots going off—tall, tough-looking lads full of character, one or two with revolvers slung round them or stuck into their boots. Resembled pirates—many haven't shaved for a day or two. One said to me: "Those Beaufighters just tear a machine open with their cannon." Another said: "Enemy Ack-Ack is doing good work—shot two of our chaps down." (Our men often pay tribute to the enemy's skill, and I sometimes wonder whether we overdo this trait in our make-up. A disposition to belittle ourselves, springing from over-modesty, is widespread.)

November 21st, 1941.

This morning we rose in starlight at 5.45 a.m. to move farther up. We didn't shave. But others we had to wait for were not ready, and we didn't move off till 7.30. Had we known, we had ample time to breakfast, shave and move off comfortably. One begins to feel filthy.

Last night we saw Colonel F. The situation is steadying—not nearly so favourable to us as at first.

This morning we passed one or two of our new tanks which fell out on the way up with oil or gear trouble. Their crews are running out of water and rations.

(Last night I fell into a slit trench in the dark. Wasn't hurt. We went on, shouting "P.R." into the darkness and waiting for an answering call. Easiest thing in the world to get lost. Some ten days ago Mostyn-Owen moved 200 yards off in the night, failed to find us on his return and spent the night in a friendly truck.)

To-day at dawn the expected sortie from Tobruk was made. Not much news of it, however. Naval guns are bombarding Halfaya Pass.

Every hour or two one hears fresh statements made of enemy losses and some estimate of our own. Not till the second day of the offensive does the enemy appear to have wakened up and begun weaving and inter-weaving with our forces. In the oasis region of Siwa and Gialo we claim to have destroyed all the enemy aircraft there were. It was on the third day that the first great clashes between our tanks occurred. And so forth.

To-night I saw our Bombay bombers arriving, bringing supplies of ammunition. We are using aircraft for Red Cross purposes—flying back stretchers, half a dozen or so in one plane.

November 22nd, 1941.

I hear that Captain Robert Crisp, the South African test bowler, who is fighting in an American tank, knocked out two tanks in two successive shots.

This is a lovely morning. I was enjoying the sunshine when our Maryland bombers flew overhead, bound on one of their destructive errands. I looked up and saw under their bellies their bombs in neat rows like great fish.

I'm told that the desert, looked down on from above, resembles half a dozen crazy Clapham Junctions in its criss-crossing tracks in the sand.

The sun yesterday was such that P. A. was stripped to the buff when he welcomed us.

I'm reminded that Conyngham said, apropos the *Luftwaffe* in Russia and its strength, that Hitler had apparently got hold, not of Goering's figures, but of Goebbel's by mistake.

At noon to-day the day turned to driving wind and slight sandstorm with some rain. It was a change as sudden as any England can boast. Quentin Reynolds has arrived, fat, grey-eyed, pretty quiet. I said : "You had a lively time " (they were reported missing, he and Litvinoff and Monckton). He said: " We didn't know it. At Baku (I think) we had caviar one night and ballet the next."

The B.B.C. news is too optimistic—declares that for every tank we have lost the enemy have lost three. The facts so far as I know them are that the Germans have lost seventy-six, the Italians forty-five and we about the same as the Germans. But, indeed, nobody can say with exactitude.

Several fighter air stations are near to us, and we drove over. Our pilots have almost a fashion in being unshaven—some are veritable Captain Kettles—and wearing white silk neckerchiefs. One said to me: " From the air, tanks look like lines of other vehicles moving towards one another firing as they go—they look a mile or more apart, but it's hard to say. No, there wasn't much dust." Another, who'd been strafing convoys, said : " Gee, you should have seen the Ities jumping out of their lorries and diving into ditches." A third said: " There were thirteen of us—didn't know there were thirteen. One of our chaps did a crash-dive straight into the earth—don't know who it was. Mine got hit in the wing." I saw a jagged, ugly hole in the forward rim; he was hit in the engine, too, but got back safely.

I watched a Lieut. Lacey of the South Africans land his machine on its belly—its wheels wouldn't work. He had tried to get down two or three times—first one wheel would come down, but never both together.

Finally, he decided to get down without wheels. He skidded about 100 yards along the ground, the prop. got bent, but nothing much else. He wasn't hurt, and I saw him standing on the running board of a car waiting to be driven off; he hadn't turned a muscle.

A Group Captain said: "Jerry has got his light Ack-Ack absolutely taped. When you *strafe* his convoys a sheet of stuff comes up at you like rain going the wrong way."

One of our air commodores, D.S.O. and two bars, who was in Paris when Hitler arrived there, having been captured and escaped three times, who walked to Gibraltar and is described to me as the most determined of men, is reported to have said when our over-optimistic folk thought this offensive was already won in its first days: "Don't you believe it." One of our pilots tells me he met eighteen Me.109s. to-day for the first time since the offensive started. Another pilot said: "We feel wizard—glad to go up any time." A Group Captain said: "We outnumber the enemy, but their Me.109Fs. in some ways have a superior performance to our machines."

At 4 p.m. the sky was full of roaring—we had about nine bombers and orty fighters in the air together.

About this time we went over to see Air Vice-Marshal Conyngham again. He sat on the dashboard of a truck and we sat round in the wind. He talked for well over an hour and the wind grew bitterly cold. We were all glad to drink whisky and water. Astley, with great generosity, wanted to give me his whisky.

Conyngham spoke of the need for some geographical aid to fighters in getting back to their landing grounds—if we could push our fighters forward about fifty miles it would be equivalent to doubling their numbers. The enemy fighters can fight well at 25,000 feet. Our best height is considerably lower, so we stay there and make the enemy come down to our level. "Of course," said Conyngham, "they come and peck at us from above"—making a diving gesture with his hand. Conyngham is a man of humour—told how he can now wash all over in a cup of water, using a corner of his towel; told how he is living feudal with half a dozen men crawling under a bit of his tent at night; said, "That's Hendon stuff," when some of our machines went overhead in beautiful formation —said he was sending that squadron away for doing it. He spoke of the increased morale of the pilots who have Hurricane IIs. and of how delighted the Blenheim pilots are to have fighter escorts. "They can't stop laughing."

He spoke of the difficulties of pushing supplies forward—said it's like a pyramid—you need about 1,000 tons behind to get 1 ton forward; similarly you need about 5,000 men to put 1 ton of bombs on Germany.

Astley said: "You'll never believe this, but the sergeant-major shot a

moorhen with his revolver twenty yards from my tent. How a moorhen came to be there, heaven knows."

November 23rd, 1941.

To-day R. C. was descried riding on top of a truck. He had been to Cairo by air. When the truck stopped, out stepped a lady, Mademoiselle Eve Curie, daughter of Madame Curie (about whom the daughter wrote a good book, which I have read). But Mademoiselle creates obvious problems in a region where the decencies cannot be observed and man takes a trek into the desert to seek loneliness for his necessary occupations. Men on the point of making that trek promptly desisted and hoped darkness would soon fall. I hear she will sleep in a motor-car.

Later she drove over to a fighter landing ground, and a broadcast meeting was arranged between her and Quentin Reynolds—not free from criticism this; I heard a squadron-leader saying this was reducing the war to a Hollywood set-up, for R. C. was wearing his Hebron shepherd's coat and looked decidedly like a film director.

While that bit of theatricality was going on, a squadron-leader was telling me how one of his squadron and one of the enemy did a head-on crash, tearing a wing off each. This squadron-leader went on: " I've got pilots all over the desert—one's with the Indian Division—they've come down here and there and not yet got back. But they all come rolling home. Of twenty-five who fought last night, all are now home except three." Then he said: " We've just got some beer—the first since we arrived a week ago." Another said: " Last night we went to Sidi Nish—drank all the beer there was."

We are all receiving cables saying our first despatches never arrived. Mine reads: " Now find your stuff delayed in London." Two men of an agency who've been working like dogs have received a cable saying: " Where've you been the past four days? " Yet another has a message: " We've not heard of you for three weeks. Wouldn't it be a good idea to send us a few words about the offensive? " (" Send facts and forget history " read an instruction to a colleague recently.) A correspondent who is a philosopher says: " It doesn't matter so long as we are winning the war."

A pilot who flew half an hour ago over the scene of a former tank battle said: " It's very quiet up there now—nothing happening—just a hell of a big fire in the middle which looks like a petrol dump gone up."

" Meet any Jerries? "

" Not a sausage."

An Australian colleague, speaking of a man in Tobruk, said: " He got very bomb happy after you left. He said that the German bombers

when their engines made that sound ur ! ur ! ur ! were really saying: ' You ! You ! You ! ' We kidded him out of it, saying: ' Hi ! How far was that bomb off you last night ? ' "

November 24th, 1941.

Another lovely morning. For the first time I saw enemy aircraft overhead. Our Ack-Ack went into action.

I'm told our American colleagues have a passion for starting work about midnight, hammering away till the small hours. As for me, I'm sometimes rolled in my blankets by 7.30 or eight o'clock. It's dark by 6 p.m. Our Public Relations unit has but one tent—Astley's office—but he kindly invites us to use it as a workshop. You can see half a dozen of us hammering away in the evening by oil-lamp, drinking a little whisky out of tin mugs and indulging such wit as we possess. A good deal of this life is thoroughly enjoyable, despite discomforts. Our tea is boiled in half a petrol tin, fires to cook are made by filling the other half-tin with sand and pouring petrol on the sand and dropping a match on it. Blazes like the devil. Nobody could describe our tin plates, etc., as well washed. Bully cold, fried, stewed, is better known to us than a brother, the tea is sweeter than nectar, we eat standing up in the wind or perched on a petrol tin round the truck side, we make the same plate serve for meat and sweet (wiping it with toilet paper between the two), we wash and shave in a cupful of cold water that often looks rusty, and one goes to bed in trousers and socks with a muffler wrapped round the head. (I use two sleeping bags and two blankets inside a valise, the whole placed on my small wood and canvas bed.) My " Lie-Low " was first borrowed by an American and is now loaned to a Frenchman. Some of the Americans have turned up without camp kit or any suitable clothing. They think the desert is Broadway.

This tank battle strikes me as being like a naval battle, but here are no ports to which our landships can withdraw. Yesterday was the day of our hardest tank fighting and the day of our greatest successes in the air—we shot down thirty-five machines, including about five Me.109Fs. A South African Brigadier is reported captured; New Zealanders are ordered (it's said) to retake Sidi Rezegh at all costs. Enemy reported to have only two or three dozen single-seater fighters left—doubts expressed if they can reinforce much. (Sounds incredible to me.) The R.A.F. warned us all last night that we might be raided, but we weren't.

In the distance one sees clouds of sand where aircraft have taken off and, occasionally, intermixed is black smoke as though a bomb has fallen there.

The B.B.C. announces 15,000 prisoners. The correct figure, in my opinion, is only a fraction of this.

Our H.Q. become more secretive—complain of correspondents visiting H.Q. to secure information. This H.Q. attitude doubtless arises from the situation growing more sticky.

I'm very troubled about our wounded and what happens to them. These tank battle-fields are twenty-five or 100 square miles or more in area, and what succour can there be? A shell enters a tank, sets it on fire or smashes it to pieces, and men indescribably wounded are the result. What ambulance is near and how can the wounded be found? They are often long distances from our bases or camps.

An ex-Sussex detective, shutting down his tank turret preparatory to battle, is reported to have said: " It can't be worse than dealing with the Worthing murders." At Sidi Omar Italians came out of shelters, throwing automatic weapons on the ground and waving hands in the air. Soon afterwards our Mr. Atkins was using Italian fires to do his cooking. But taking the place had been costly. We lost a number of tanks. Those tanks advanced in Indian file through a gap between two minefields.

At 2 p.m. we were on the point of setting out for Sidi Omar when Churchill hurried into camp with the news that the Italian Arriete Division had broken through and attacked Corps H.Q., that members of Corps staff had departed in a rush, and that a liaison officer's aircraft couldn't wait for him. Nobody knows at the moment where Corps H.Q. is. As we cannot, in any event reach Sidi Omar to-night and the situation is now vague and uncertain, I decided to defer departure till to-morrow morning. Capture by Germans is the last thing I desire. A great duel between our R.A.F. and those Italian tanks is now said to be developing.

About 4.30 p.m. a motor-cyclist drove up and shouted: " You must be ready to move in half an hour." Um! The situation is vague, then, to some tune. Of course, it's always been obvious that in open fighting of this sort, advances or withdrawals might be swift. I said, jokingly, as we drove down to the desert a week ago, that we should enter Benghazi as the enemy entered Alexandria, having by-passed one another on the way. I began to pack up my small tent. We're very short of transport, and it looked doubtful if everything could be moved. However, about 5.30 one of our groups of correspondents who've been in the advanced area arrived, having retired precipitately. H., who looked much thinner than six days ago, said: " We haven't been eating—had no time. And we've slept in the car. We seem to have failed to concentrate our forces against his, and we've often been using light tanks against heavier ones—terriers against mastiffs. There was the night when the brigadier who was out fighting asked his second in command, who was in leaguer, to

put a flare up to show where he was. He did that and promptly the Germans attacked that leaguer."

R. asserts that this push by the enemy is their last kick, but adds that a German prisoner who saw Rommel three days ago declares Rommel was very confident.

Some points emerge—when a German tank drives up, out jumps a spare driver, who runs to any British transport knocking about, in the hope of being able to drive it off. The enemy have a shell which, so to speak, hops along before exploding (but this surely may be pure accident). They use Very lights by day. So alike to ours are some German tanks that one of our majors went forth to direct a handful of German tanks into our leaguer.

Four or five South African war correspondents have been captured. They were involved in a heavy fight between the 5th South African Brigade when the latter were attacked and largely overrun by enemy tanks. Some of the South Africans having, at last, no other weapons remaining, attacked those tanks with bayonets.

Our general plan seems to have lacked subtlety. We've dashed in with our tanks, using them as cavalry. We've lacked co-ordination and we've been frequently outgunned by the German tanks, which mount a 75-millimetre gun. This gun can open range on us at 1,500 yards or more. Our gunners using American "Honey" tanks have orders not to open fire at anything beyond a certain range—no use doing so. We are thus as destroyers opposing cruisers. We haven't bombed their tanks enough. We have no dive-bombers to do it with. On the other hand, our men's gallantry is superb. Our 166 American light tanks held off about 170 enemy heavier ones.

H. tells me that at 5.35 p.m. a good deal of tracer and shells came whizzing into Brigade H.Q. when he was there; there was machine-gunning on one side of him, shells the other. His party drove rapidly for sixteen to twenty miles. Meanwhile, the Colonel in charge organised a defence with twenty tanks against seventy and fought till dark, went into leaguer, sent up the flare (as I've mentioned earlier) and the Germans attacked again.

To-night we've been informed that our machine-guns have been fixed to fire across this camp and that anybody moving after dark (which is about 6 p.m.) will be shot. (A man with Gippy tummy looks like being shot half a dozen times.) All rather absurd.

At 9.30 p.m. an immense flare rose on the horizon, presumbly enemy, though nobody knows. However, flares can be seen ten miles off.

November 25th, 1941.

The roar of aircraft warming up engines just before dawn to-day shook the very heavens. Machine-guns cracked as gunners tried their mechanism.

There was supposed to be a tank battle proceeding nearby and at 11.30 a.m. we set off to see what we could see. At 9 a.m. we had heard gunfire. Four German tanks were reported to be coming south from Sidi Omar, along Mussolini's wire. We stopped incoming parties to interrogate them. A R.A.F. corporal who was near Corps H.Q. yesterday said: "Jerries came to within ten yards of us and opened up with Tommy guns. They beckoned to us. None of us was hit." Another said: "We were towing a Maryland in with Jerry a mile behind us."

Other statements made to us this morning were—a South African sergeant: "Twenty miles from Tobruk Jerry was entrenched and when we came up, he let us have it. We had three armoured cars and I don't think there's anybody left but me. We took 800 prisoners in the morning, but he attacked with tanks in the afternoon, and, as we had no tanks, we got it badly. We've been dive-bombed every day." Another South African said: "Our gunners fought their 25-pounders to the last gun and the last shell. We got a lot of their tanks—one battery believes they knocked out over forty. Germany infantry came on behind the tanks—their lorries and carriers advanced, weaving to and fro, and when they got near, the men leapt out and advanced almost shoulder to shoulder, using Tommy guns firing explosive bullets. One of our sergeants leapt on to a German tank with a grenade in his hand. The German threw up the turret-lid to strike our sergeant—and the sergeant chucked his grenade into the tank and the tank blew up, killing our sergeant as well as the rest."

In the early afternoon it looked for a while as though we were about to see a tank battle. We were near Maddalena. About twenty-three American tanks rolled up towards us. We talked to a young Hussars officer commanding one. He said: "We've impressed twenty-three drivers from the Ferry service. I myself was recuperating from Greece." The squadron-leader attached to the Brigadier, who was wearing his brass hat, said: "We have no plans—we don't want to be harassed at the moment."

"What a break!" commented an American, fiddling with his maps and field glasses. He had been captured in Syria by the French and now, as a column of transport came over the horizon on our right and we wondered if they were German, somebody asked: "Can a man be captured twice?" It was an interesting scene. A wrecked red-nosed Tomahawk was in the middle of the plain, and a signaller was up a telephone pole mending a wire. Somebody told him what was afoot,

whereupon he cried down the wire: " Corporal Watson, I've got to get away from here, they say," and he shinned down.

S. said, " This is the first time I've felt like a general." Half an hour later our Bren carriers moved back, and trucks rolled up, dragging tank transporters; next came our transport pulling Bofors guns which had been adapted to anti-tank guns. We asked a gunner if we were in the way. " No, but you may see some fun," he said. It was very hot. We stood on a rocky escarpment, lumps of shale at our feet and brown desert all round, the horizon one to four miles distant. Our commander now put out a fan of tanks and ran another lot in line ahead under a ridge. The whole business was extraordinarily like Salisbury Plain manœuvres. And, indeed, no battle occurred. Slowly our tanks advanced out of sight. We drove after them, but they went on and on and darkness was coming. They disappeared like steamers putting out smoke from their stacks (the sand they stirred up).

W. said: " Do you notice how the hands of some of these men back from the front tremble a bit? " W. was in the fighting in Flanders—saw an occasion when the Germans came on mixed with refugees at Gravelines and our troops had the awful duty of firing on the mixed throng.

We called at a field dressing-station. A German soldier lay in a tent suffering from gangrene. " You won't be able to stand the smell," the orderly said. But an American went in to talk to him. I walked over to talk to a group near an ambulance. On the top stretcher inside lay a German forestry officer, asleep. The medical orderly had said: " Our chaps say there's been a big blunder "; and here in this group the men asked: " What's the news? What are the papers saying? " A sergeant of the 22nd Armoured Brigade began to tell us how they had knocked out forty-eight Italian tanks the first morning, and another N.C.O., a New Zealander, described how at Gambut they had taken 204 German ground staff at the aerodrome and wrecked nineteen aircraft. Some of our wounded had cropped heads and were not distinguishable in features from Germans. " At Gambut," one said, " we took four lorry-loads of Germans asleep in their vehicles—they hadn't even put a sentry on. Seventeen ordinary motor-cars were used by the enemy to bring up infantry—our tanks knocked out eleven of them in no time."

Seven hundred cases came through this dressing-station yesterday. One was a major 6 feet 5 inches high, who had both legs hurt when a shell entered his tank and killed the crew. He levered himself out of the tank, put tourniquets on both legs, crawled away from the blazing tank, and is recovering. A medical officer turned up yesterday, bringing a German ambulance and a lorry. He had been captured, but in an ensuing attack the enemy retreated, leaving him behind. He filled the German ambulance with our wounded and brought them along.

The enemy have, in various places, been dug-in flush with the ground, so that our men, who've had to attack across the open, have not seen them. " They keep on firing till you're ten yards off — then they put their hands up," said a wounded New Zealander.

A British pilot flying back from a fight saw a second pilot bale out. He flew down beside him, landed, put him into his cockpit, tried to take off, but the tyre burst. The enemy were near, but the two pilots ran off and escaped and on their way back crawled through an Italian camp. Both men are safe.

November 26th, 1941.

General Gott, who commands the 7th Armoured Division and General Willoughby Norrie, who has the 30th Corps, were called upon to make a dash by night through enemy lines. They put five tanks in the van and marshalled a few more on the flanks. Then they set off, their tanks making as much row as possible. " The Germans were a lot more frightened than we were," said General Norrie to me afterwards. A German motor-cyclist actually came into our column to ask a question. He was most surprised at what he saw. Flares were going up all round. The generals got through without mishap.

In one or two German tanks our men found 4 lb. of Ogden's tobacco —the German ration (previously captured from us—when, one doesn't know. Their soldiers have been found with Gold Flake cigarettes, too. Maybe they date back to Flanders.)

One of our official photographers has been giving me an account of what he saw. Among his experiences was a tank battle at night: " Shells were criss-crossing in the dark, making yellow and red and even blue streaks. They bounced on the ground and ricochetted like the devil. The row was terrific. One lot of our gunners said they had five guns left out of forty-nine. As we drove back—the moment I got to Div. H.Q. we were shelled and the moment I got to 30th Corps H.Q. we were shelled—it was as though I took the shelling with me."

We had tanks guarding Battle H.Q. last night.

Although we have command of the air, it's extremely difficult to find out what's going on. We cannot discover where 30th Corps is or where Div. H.Q. is, nor where the enemy tank force now is. Yesterday, when we visited some of our fighter landing grounds inside Libya, they had been " grounded " that morning and were withdrawing backwards.

At 3.35 p.m. we joined an immense convoy that was bound for Div. H.Q. and thence to Brigadier Gatehouse. Unhappily, after some miles,

we found that the Humber car coming behind us (part of our unit) was missing. The sky was beautiful, blue with mountains of white cloud. We hung about waiting, lost the convoy, and finally camped for the night on 7th Div. axis. We were invited by the tank repair unit to take a drink with them. To our surprise, we found they had a fine little mess under canvas next to a truck—a table-cloth, plates, knives and forks, such luxury as we have not seen for a fortnight. Nearby, in the afternoon, a group of men had played football.

The tank repair unit (R.Es. and Ordnance Corps) were most intelligent—pleasant to meet such folk. A young Major said they had 200 men at that moment (midnight) working on repairing tanks and within three days about thirty of them would be fit for battle again. (Elsewhere is a further dump.) They told us a few tales—how true I can't say—how we had gone after von Rommel determinedly—and actually shot the driver of his car from the air; how von Rommel had been overheard saying on his radio: " Only darkness can save me "; how he held a conference of desperation near Sherfersen (on the wire).

November 27th, 1941.

It was bitterly cold last night—we slept out of doors. I got only two hours' sleep. Night-long the guns were firing far-off, roaring and booming as they used to boom in France.

This morning we lighted on a cluster of German prisoners—fifty or so—mostly signallers captured at Gambut. Their clothes are greenish-grey gabardine—no vestige of wool visible; their caps are the same stuff. (By comparison, our men are finely clad.) Their boots are half linen, half leather. But the men were sturdy, and most of them about twenty-five years old. None spoke English; a few spoke some French. One youthful sergeant-major, asked if he were glad to be captured, said " No," it was *très triste*. They were unshaven, dejected.

One of our officers in charge of the prisoners said 7th Div. is pleased as Punch with the situation, that the Germans " are eating stones," because the German Q. arrangements have been a gigantic failure.

Quite by chance we came on the Guards Brigade H.Q.—the Brigadier seated in a canvas chair in the sun, as unconcerned as though he were in his garden at home. His spectacles had been broken at the side and were mended with wool wrapping, as a vicar who must count his pence might mend his. He sat there, his map in its glazed covering on his knee, and explained the situation so far as he could. I asked if they had been in action. He said they had made contact once or twice, a bit of an exchange here and there, " but we don't *claim* anything." They had been on lines of communication all the time. (How charmingly modest this was, and how English.)

The Brigade Major came up to report—" Sherfersen clear of enemy,

sir. Any instructions ? " The Brigadier pondered. " Say I propose, if it fits in with Neptune's plans, I propose so-and-so." He told us the Germans had driven through a dump with their tank column, had shot up the water, but missed the petrol; they had also omitted to notice that in that dump were 900 German or Italian prisoners. The Brigade Major had a story of a group of our correspondents who went to a field ambulance, thinking it was British, and found it was German. The Germans said: " You're not armed and we don't want you. You'd better go away." (But this wasn't true of Harold Denny, and G. H. P. Anderson of the Associated Press and Edward Ward of the B.B.C., who are all captured.)

As we talked, a General came up. The friendliness, the family feeling of one general to another is pleasant and reduces war to something social. " Hello, John." " Hello, Eric. I was on my way to see Pip. Thought I'd call—they don't know what I want to know at Army."

We drove on to a concentration of lorries, etc., in the midst of which was a green tent described to us as Corps H.Q.—or part of it. A tank nearby was named " Saucy Joe." Two German staff cars drove through here last night, sentries fired at them and missed. One wonders if it could have been von Rommel. When Generals Norrie and Gott clattered through the enemy lines a night or two ago, a German column passed within a few hundred yards. Again, could Rommel have been in it ? Nothing is impossible in this fluid, treacherous warfare. But it's much to be preferred to sitting month after month in filthy trenches !

At 4.35 p.m. to-day across the far horizon came a number of armoured cars. Was this the fringe of battle ? Behind us were hundreds of M.T. and various H.Q. A decisive battle is said to be now proceeding. A Lieutenant-Colonel of the 7th Armoured Division had recently remarked to us: " Better get ready for action—don't know what this is "—pointing to the horizon. The sun was westering and there was a coldish wind.

An armoured car drove up, escorting an ambulance. A padre ran across, asking if he might speak to the wounded man, reported to be Sir W. B. Two Italian lorries in our possession, burning Diesel oil that stinks for miles, drove across in the mid-distance.

This evening we were invited to the signal car, an armoured vehicle to which radio reports come. The report said: " We've been at it all day in rather a gentlemanly fashion "—which was interpreted as meaning the Germans were rather short of ammunition. They told me we had sent for all ambulances that morning, but, in fact, the casualties were rather light. (Some of our wounded from tanks lie out twenty-four hours or more; it's inevitable—they're hard to find sometimes.)

Sitting in the control car was fascinating—a signaller was repeating

such phrases as " Zero niner forty-two." An officer on the telephone was saying: "You want another A.F.V.? Take the C.O's. boudoir. I can't find you anything—I haven't enough for support group." Another officer was saying—" Edward Toc George calling, Edward Toc George calling. Is Atlas on the set ? "

These kindly folk were insistent we should dine with them, but, knowing rations are not too plentiful, we dined off our own food, but went over for a drink of canned American beer. The Colonel next to me told how the other night a German voice came on his radio, pretending to be British. It said: " This is Freddie George King speaking. Freddie George King speaking. I will send you dive-bombers tomorrow." To which the Colonel replied, telling him what he could do with his dive-bombers; and to get off the line damned quick. On two successive nights this German voice came on the radio. (A tank Captain told me a similar story. The voice came on requesting him to go two miles on compass bearing 165 and there leaguer. This bearing would have taken him into enemy territory. He asked the voice: " Can you identify yourself? " Whereupon it disappeared. Half an hour later the authentic voice called him up telling him to leaguer at so and so—in the opposite direction. Germany effrontery and impudence remains unmatched, as it was in Flanders.)

This battle has become largely a question of which side can recover and repair its tanks the better. The enemy was in command of the battlefield for a day or two, and no doubt he made good use of that command in recovering his tanks—and ours. He's using some infantry tanks of ours that he captured some time ago.

A major of military police who has much to do with prisoners says that the Italians don't care which side wins—they are not interested in the war any more. The Germans, he believes, are hard-pressed for stocks of food and water. He supports the view with the fact that they captured fourteen of our ambulances, kept them in their column for twenty miles and then bade them go—doing so because they couldn't provide any supplies for them. About 1,700 prisoners from the Panzer Division have gone through the nearby cage.

Speaking of the U.S.A. tanks, an Ordnance Colonel said: " They are the bee's whisker, but they need a bigger gun." At one time in the battle the enemy had knocked out more of our tanks than we had of theirs. The common view is that Winston started off this campaign by pitching it on too high a note; that we ought to have begun modestly and waited for hard results before shouting.

One of our doctors with a Hussar regiment was captured with eight of his officers, all wounded. The Germans showed them little consideration or attention, and the doctor roundly abused them, citing the

Geneva Convention, etc. After that, they rendered some help and the doctor got a German ambulance and packed his wounded in it. They all drove off, but after a while the doctor prodded his pipe held like a revolver into the German driver's back and told him to drive south—which he did. Thus he brought his men to our lines and on the way picked up a large number of New Zealand wounded and brought them along, too.

November 28th, 1941.

We moved from leaguer before dawn; I fumbled my bed together. My two companions slept in the car, but I prefer the labour of putting up my tent and my bed. They say: "What if we have to move off in a rush? Suppose the leaguer is attacked?" To which I reply: "I must risk that—probably won't happen. At a pinch, I shall leave tent and bed behind—may as well leave them behind as never use them at all." But nothing has happened. The patrolling sentry nudged my tent to rouse me and the whole thing gently subsided on me—a job to get from under it. In no time at all eight yellow fires were blazing in the neighbourhood, making tea.

A convoy sergeant said to me: "Nine Me.109s. came down to no feet and machine-gunned us, but only two men were wounded—one shoulder, one arm. Marvellous they did no more damage than that. Can't understand it."

A R.A.F. officer, driving across the desert yesterday, picked up a major who had lost his foot in the fighting and a captain with his right arm off; both had been lying out twenty-four hours. This is the price of war.

General Willoughby Norrie, who is extremely helpful and stands with his big map (held by his officers or by us), explaining what's happening, tells me the Germans are using some dummy tanks mounted on lorries. I asked him if the Italians are fighting better than we expected. He said, smiling: "The Italians' tanks fight well, because they are manned by Germans." The enemy in the Tobruk region are reported to have sent a message saying that unless help is received by them quickly, they cannot survive. In Norrie's view, the drive across the battlefield centre by Rommel was in the nature of a gambler's last throw—"I admire him for it, but. . . ." He said that prisoners we take don't know where they are going, or what's happening, and are poorly off for food. He added that the South Africans' resistance on the first day of battle (when the South Africans lost very heavily) was the turning point of the battle, for they knocked out forty-five tanks. Norrie looks a bit thinner—he's still wearing his greenish trousers and lamb's-wool jacket with its ribbons. He doesn't think at the moment it's

safe to go to Support Group, five miles off. (Odd enemy tanks are floating about.)

However, at 2.30 we set off for Support Group on a compass bearing. German tanks—about twenty—have moved back towards Menastir. We've heard that the enemy are short of food and petrol. Those German tanks are presumed to be off to find, guard, or rifle dumps, as the case may be.

On the way we passed several broken German cars. The battlefield is lightly littered. I took a sugar container of celluloid and a couple of bullets. The spirit of loot is easily stirred up. Our drivers race off like mad to any broken-down car they see. A young officer, grinning all over his face, said Rommel is said to have said that Tobruk has fallen to them, and that Moscow has. fallen, and that they must endure hardships because of supplies being needed in Russia. (This is probably balderdash, but worth recording as an example of tales which spread among the troops.)

While waiting to see Brigadier " Jock " Campbell, I ran into an old acquaintance from the Scots Guards, who are nearby. The Guards are well—one officer only not accounted for. (We had heard fearsome tales a week ago of their losses. Mr. Atkins can be most unreliable and most sensational in the gloomy vein.) Brigadier Campbell, sometimes described as our best desert fighter, is over 6 feet—genial (as most of our good officers are), wearing a blue cravat, and as steady as the Rock of Gibraltar. He said some groups of the enemy are now little more than rabble.

I asked if it were true that one of his sergeants had been captured, interrrogated by von Rommel himself and had afterwards escaped. He said he thought it was, and directed us to the sergeant who hails from Northumberland. But before we left the Brigadier, he explained that the tank battle that's imminent may well be decisive—the enemy has a well-organised force of some seventy tanks driving down the Capuzzo-Trigh road towards Tobruk. He tried the drive yesterday and we dispersed him. He is now on the point of trying once more. He is fond of beginning his battle about four o'clock in the afternoon—especially if he can get the sun behind him.

We found the sergeant, who brought his mug of tea over to our car, sat inside and told us his story. He was a Supplementary Reservist, his hair is turning grey, and he talked in that laconic, dry fashion typical of our North-Countrymen. He and two privates set off with a heavy Scammell lorry to recover a vehicle; they were told it was three miles distant, but they journeyed six, and couldn't find it. It was about 9 a.m. on November 21st—" The first time," he said, " Jerry got behind us." The Scammell got stuck in the sand. One of the privates went to a nearby group of tents for help, but the inhabitants turned out to be

Germans—men of the Panzer Division. They began firing at our men; they were captured and taken to the German H.Q. An interpreter who spoke with an American accent asked if they were pleased to be out of the war. (A stock question for prisoners on both sides.) He replied: " Not particularly—I'd rather be fighting with our own lads." The interpreter rejoined: " You'll get taken away out of it." At that moment von Rommel drove up. (The sergeant was sure it was he from the deference paid to him and from photographs he saw afterwards.) The sergeant went on: " The Germans jumped up, Heiling Hitler, and taking photographs. He seemed to like being photographed. He was a well-built man, red face, strong-looking, a Prussian sort of officer—condescended to speak to some young lieutenants, and they were pleased as Punch. I stood to attention, but didn't salute. He said to me: 'Well, Englander, are you pleased you are out of it now.' I said I was not—I wanted to be in it with my own people. He was particularly anxious to know whether I had come by the oasis side of Giarabub or by Matruh. He asked what division I was and I said I was in Ordnance and worked for anybody. He smiled and seemed good-humoured. He never got out of his car, stood up leaning his hand on the windscreen. The car had a blue-and-white sign on each wing. He then drove off into the eschelon. He'd spoken good English, not fast, not much German accent, but you'd know he was foreign.

" I travelled with the Germans for three days in a troop carrier lorry with ten men of the Panzer infantry. We were absolutely bombarded to hell with British 25-pounders and 60-pounders—all over the camp; our 2-pounders came flying through, too. We'd no bombing. The second night of the battle we were in what our chaps call 'the Valley of Death'—tanks and everything in it—near Sidi Rezegh. Our people sent some stuff over that night ! The third morning we moved south again and again we ran into our 25-pounders—a real fight, shells, the Panzers, caterpillars. Then suddenly everything was turned completely round and we drove back through a barrage. I've never seen a barrage like it. I saw rows of German dead being buried. When the barrage got too bad, they took us from the troop lorry and put us in a truck. As we drove back, everything got stuck and we were put on the ground and ordered into a circle. I had only been there ten minutes when our tanks came blazing through and groups dived for Jerry vehicles to get out of the road. A tank stopped near us and burst into flames. We edged away—it was getting dusk by that time. A rearguard was coming up and we edged farther and farther off, till we got into some bushes. The light was going and the moon coming up. We edged away on our stomachs—I had my compass. After a while we could get up, and we walked one hour south and then turned east. We walked half an hour east and then heard voices—it was the wireless at an advanced dressing-station. We gave them a hail: ' Are you British ? ' ' Yes, who are you ? ' ' For Christ's sake, take us in.' "

I asked him how the enemy are fixed for food. He said: " They're badly off. First day, we never got anything at all—I had my own bottle of water, but we finished that. Second day, we got two slices of brown bread between the three of us, but my throat was that bad I couldn't swallow it. That day, too, we got some weak tea without sugar or milk. Twice in those three days the Germans had stew. We got stew on the last day. They had just one meal a day, but nibbled a bit in between. They had Iti marmalade, too. A cookhouse like a van travelled with them."

I asked if the Germans were friendly. He said: " No. They didn't insult us, but they weren't sociable. Sitting in the truck with them, they never spoke. Finally, I got a cigarette. One said he'd been to an English school. I showed 'em my photos. If I dallied outside the truck they shouted: ' Up ! Up ! ' They took all my kit and food, but never searched us properly—never went under my sweater for my money.

" I never slept for three days. They had only one blanket each, and they never slept either, for we travelled the first night, and the second night they were in action.

" I think they are automatons—just do what the officer says. I don't think they know much about the war at all. An order came round that Moscow had fallen—it cheered them up. I think they were told that because they had a difficult job to do—it was before we drove through the barrage.

" I couldn't eat much at the dressing-station, but I drank and drank and drank—pints of tea. I've been thirsty ever since."

Finally he said, drily, " I don't want to be taken on the ration strength of the German Army."

To-night we supped off German stew—tinned stuff—from a derelict lorry. It was excellent. Most enemy equipment lying about is good—their screw-topped water-bottles, ammunition, tommy-cookers, etc. Doesn't appear to be anything *ersatz* about it.

November 29th, 1941.

Since 4 a.m. to-day, the cannonading has been very loud.

I was working in the car soon after breakfast—breakfast may be seven o'clock or earlier—when shouts were heard. A French biplane was hovering over us, as though about to land—it came down to 20 or 30 feet. Men grew suspicious of it and, as it rose and flew away, some shots were fired. It was about an hour later that a cluster of transport a mile off was dive-bombed—one heard the crumping, and suddenly rising from the earth towards the sky were clouds of black, grey and brown smoke—rather as though a forest were miraculously springing from the sand, or a mountain were suddenly being fashioned. We were very close

and expected a visitation—we began to look for our tin hats and to glance round to see if a slit trench were handy. We've been very careless about both, so far. I saw the Corps Commander issue from his tent, carrying his steel helmet as though it were a basket of flowers and a bundle of papers in his hand—the wind caught some of the latter and blew them away. A colleague swears he saw another general with a rifle in his hand searching the sky for those dive-bombers as though they were pheasants ! And what better illustration of our Army could there be ? Extreme gallantry, but not much foresight—for I have discerned no Ack-Ack guns near us ; nor have I yet seen a convoy of ours on the road which was adequately protected with such guns (as are many enemy convoys). True enough, of course, that we are still short of many sorts of equipment.

General Norrie remarked to me that the battle fluctuates and will probably go on in this fashion for several days. The enemy's aim is the same as ours—to knock out tanks. By the end, I imagine, there may not be much left on either side. He said some of their tanks are better than ours, but we have the best artillery in the world. He thought we had forty-five tanks last night against seventy, but those seventy included some dummies and some being towed. Moreover, by afternoon he thought we should have a good many more tanks, fully seventy altogether, and " I " tanks in addition. He talked of amalgamating what's left of our two tank brigades, the 4th and the 22nd, under one commander—obvious advantages in unity of command.

We are bombing Bardia, which is lightly surrounded by us.

We drove over to see the aftermath of the dive-bombing—one truck blazed red and ugly. The Tommies nearby were all digging slit trenches for the first time.

At 1.30 p.m. we set off with three Bofors guns to visit the South Africans. It's as well to have an escort if you can, for nobody can say which region is safe from enemy, and when transport looms on the horizon, you never know whether it's ours or theirs. An officer on Oliver Lyttleton's staff thinks, with me, that this pounding match will go on for some days—General Gott puts it even longer. We haven't much superiority in armour now. We started off with more tanks ; but they had the heavier. (A convoy set off for the New Zealanders yesterday with some 2,000 rounds of two-pounder ammunition. That convoy had a guard of about nineteen tanks—we guard convoys as they do at sea and very necessarily, too.)

We started the journey on a sun compass bearing taken by two South African lieutenants—very likely-looking lads. At one place we could see twenty derelict vehicles littering the desert—some of them our tanks with a wisp of flag on their wireless poles. The thudding of guns was very

heavy—afternoon seems to be the time for tank battles. About ten minutes to three a dozen of our Marylands or Blenheims went over in formation to bomb enemy about six miles off and we saw the horizon blossom with the usual black forest. As they returned, one of our Bofors guns shot at them—apparently expecting them to bomb us. But as we drove nearer the scene of the bombing, it was clear that the transport bombed was that which we were driving to. Now we were in a predicament. Either our own bombers had bombed our own troops—or this transport ahead wasn't South African, but German ! I put this forcibly to my companions, but they seemed (I thought) unmindful. However, I prevailed on S. to examine the transport ahead through his glasses at intervals. He was certain they were British. So it proved.

We talked with a South African Brigadier. He thought his position sticky—he was at that time menaced by about fifty-four tanks on his right front. He had sent about thirty of his field-guns to try to help the New Zealanders and had now only seven field guns left with which to defend himself against those fifty-four tanks. He clearly thought we had under-estimated the enemy strength from the beginning of the offensive. He said, " The only right way is to take his *formations* and count those. I remember at Keren a divisional general telling me I had 1,760 enemy in front of me—why in Heavens name he didn't make it 1,800 I never knew—and about seventeen guns. I said in my view I had 12,000 enemy facing me and over fifty guns. ' Rubbish,' he said. ' Rubbish.' Well, a few days later I presented him with 10,000 prisoners and over thirty guns. The Boche doesn't fight with men—he has a wall of shells, then a wall of Stukas, then a wall of armour and the infantry behind. He doesn't fight with infantry—you can't get at the b——s. The enemy is now 14,000 yards away, with fifty-four tanks sitting there. I never believed we had two tanks to their one. If I had my thirty-four guns, I could crack the b——s."

As we talked, news came that our own tanks had tackled the fifty-four enemy tanks and the latter were retiring north-east. " Ah !" said the Brigadier. " I knew Alec would never let us down " (one of our tank commanders). And he began to tell me of how, one recent day, three of our British tanks, partially disabled, had taken up posts as stationary forts guarding his force. They stuck there for a while, but when they learned that another tank battle was being fought they came to this South African Brigadier, and a young officer said: " Look, sir, can we go and join in again ?" The Brigadier said he didn't see how they'd get there, but if they were dead keen to go, well . . . " And in about two minutes," he said to me, " you couldn't see those three old tanks for dust and sand. I don't know how they got 'em moving, but they did. It was one of the most gallant things I ever saw." He added: " I saw your tanks Brigadier in battle the other day moving his tanks about as coolly as though he were playing chess. I never want to meet a finer man."

At 5 p.m. a South African captain came to me, saying: " Here's good news. The enemy have only three days' food and two days' water, and we are moving up thirteen and a half miles to a ridge to set ourselves between two forces." We had arranged to spend the night with him, but this move forward in the dark, which would take some hours, upset our plans and we were compelled to leave. We made camp with an armoured brigade echelon. There we found officers who'd been in the first tank battle and others who'd captured German lorries. One of the latter held sixty Christmas puddings, a good deal of sliced brown bread wrapped in cellophane, 3,000 Italian cigarettes, fish paste described as " wizard," and so on.

A young officer who'd fought his tank and been hit, said: " One of our first shots hit a German Mark IV tank and laid it right open, and after that another dozen direct hits struck it. Another of our shells ricochetted and went in through the tank's belly. Then it seemed to hit their gun, for the gun barrel was suddenly thrust upwards and a shell came out and went into the sky. At one time we had twelve American tanks facing about 150 German tanks—no lack of targets. They'll stand a surprising lot, the American tanks—some were hit on the sprocket and still kept going; others were hit in the suspension without being utterly knocked out." I asked him whether the clouds of sand stirred up obscured the target. He said they did, but by long experience in the desert you can tell pretty well where, in a cloud of sand, a vehicle is, and you aim at that spot. Talking of tank repairs, he said that one squadron which had been down to four tanks was now back to seventeen tanks. You really need three tanks, he said, to guard the one you are recovering.

Another tank officer said: " The enemy opened up at 1,000 yards. We expected them to start much further off than that. We waited till they were about 900 yards off. We hit four."

Further authentic remark: " Are your guns mobile? "
"Bloody mobile if I've anything to do with it and tanks are about."

The desert is now dotted with slit trenches, resembling little graves.
The pounding grows heavier and heavier. Our tanks have now fought for twelve days without respite.

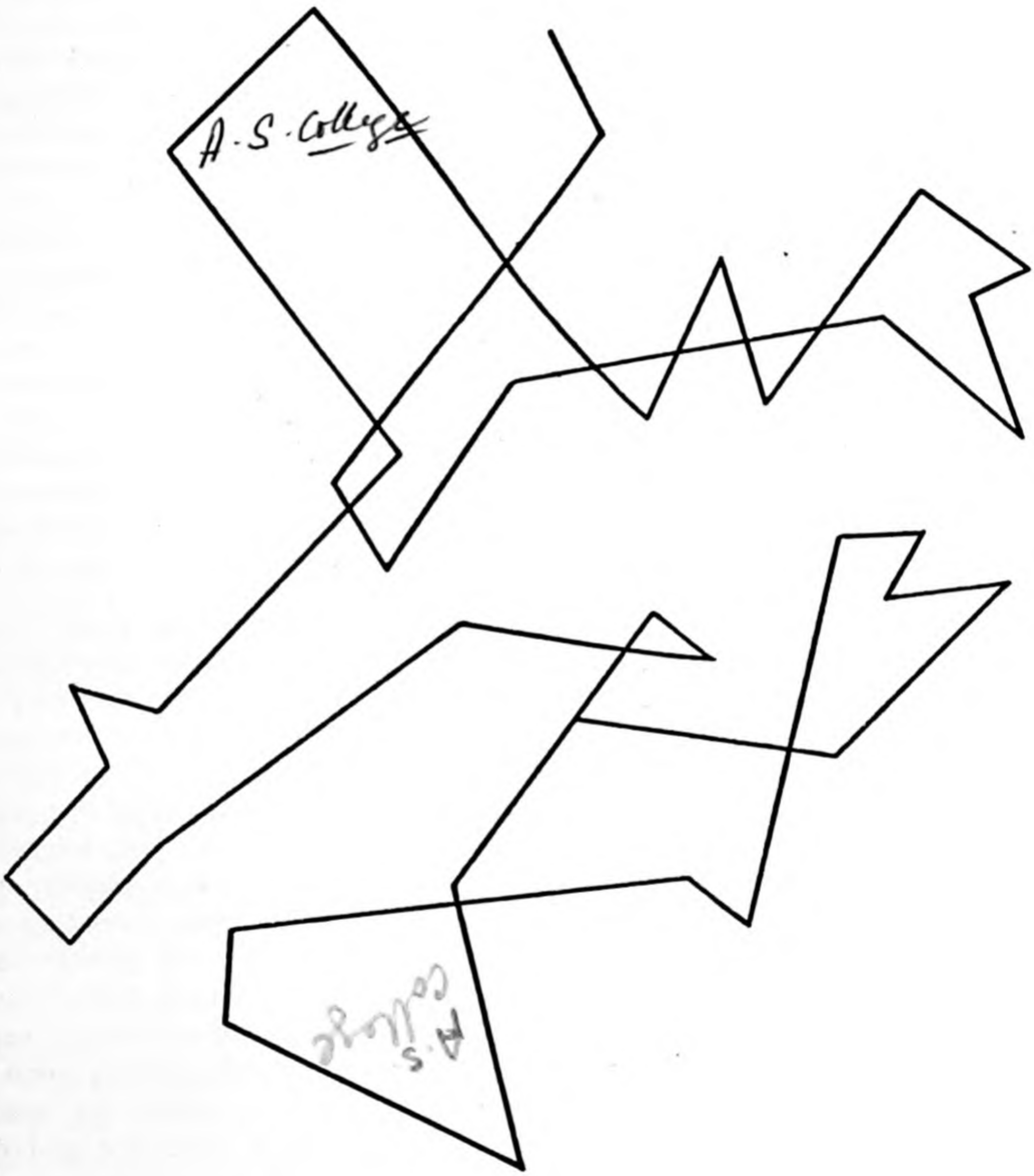
A South African officer said: " We started off with one and a quarter armoured divisions against three. I told Smuts we must have armour."

General Norrie has said to me once or twice, " It isn't men we want," but to-day he said that another division would be very useful for mopping up.

November 30th, 1941.

At 9.10 a.m. the enemy dive-bombed the echelon where we stayed last night—we were about a mile off. We were talking to a tanks lieutenant, who shouted to his men: " Watch out for yourselves. Be ready to get underneath." He was admirably cool. He had with him six brand-new British tanks going up to reinforce. As we watched, we saw two aircraft low over a ridge, then spurts of red flame and one seemed to crash. We hoped it was a Messerschmitt, and drove over; unfortunately it was a British fighter, but our pilot was safe and unperturbed. I had met him in camp some days before and he was as calm now as he had been then—most remarkable. He had fought the enemy for fifty miles, then his aircraft got damaged and did some twists and turns, over which he had no control. So he had to land it, whereupon it caught fire. When he landed he thought a British officer who ran forward wearing a woollen cap comforter (he certainly looked a desperado) was a German and the pilot bolted into some low scrub. His aircraft was now blazing hard—red and black smoke pouring out of it and small arms ammunition popping off. The sight didn't appear to move him. He said, " I wonder if I can get anything off that aircraft," and he ran over. But he couldn't. While we were there a General arrived in a Lysander, looking for Advanced Battle H.Q., which has moved.

About noon we came across seven new U.S.A. tanks bound for Brigadier Gatehouse, and sought permission to go with them—readily granted. The Captain in charge of them was formerly an importer and exporter on his own account in London. He has already had two tanks " shot under him." His breakfast had been porridge made with Army biscuits, crushed biscuits with sugar and water added—no milk. I was able to give him a few cigarettes and some chocolate, and in return he presented me with a German belt and bayonet—the belt with its clasp embossed " *Gott mit uns* " (as in the last war). We talked about tank battles. In his first, which lasted only ten minutes, our tanks were formed up in the shape of two arcs facing half-right and the enemy came at us in spearhead formation, tanks stepped back in rows, and with their heaviest tanks in front. They began firing at 1,400 yards; our best distance (they were British tanks) is a good deal less. We knocked out nine tanks in those few minutes and had one of ours hit. He said: " You go on firing till something hits you. When you're hit, the tank seems to jump back a bit—that's if it's a square hit and not just a glancing blow. The battle goes on till one side withdraws—if they withdraw, you get their wounded, and if we withdraw, they get ours; you can't stop to pick up wounded in the middle of a battle. I've been deaf in the right ear for the past four days—your own gun firing does most of that. We'd no food for the first four or five days—no hot tea; we opened a tin of jam in the turret and dipped a biscuit in it when we got a chance. It's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usually about 11 p.m. at night by the time you've leaguered and seen to the tank—done small repairs, seen to oil, etc., and then you've an hour's guard, as a rule, to do during the night. We get up about 4.30 a.m. In the latter days we've sometimes made tea in the middle of the battle —by common consent, as it were, we've withdrawn, and so have they, till we've been about 2,500 yards off each other and then made tea—watching one another closely, and they, if they've not been 'friendly,' sending some stuff over. The amount of muck that flies about in the battle is incredible; you see shells bouncing and ricochetting about—tons of it—and you wonder which one'll hit you. Jerry can be damned clever. One night when we were in leaguer he made a hell of a row on one side—we were in the shape of a triangle—and next morning we issued forth on the other side—and ran straight into anti-tank guns which he'd put down only 200 yards off. Panzer infantry try to shoot up our leaguers, but I really think we've reached the stage when both sides want to go to sleep. I counted fifty-seven enemy tanks the night before last. When you're actually firing you're probably moving backwards and forwards at a speed of about five miles an hour. At night, American tracer shows red and ours is yellow. Some stuff looks blue, too."

He had drawn in his pocket-book the movements of his armoured brigade during the first few days of the offensive. They were like this—covering over a hundred miles: (see opposite page).

He said: "Let me tell you of a brave thing I saw two days ago. One of our tanks was knocked out and only one man escaped from it, and he seemed to be wounded. In a previous battle in this neighbourhood we had lost two tanks—one of them 800 yards from the enemy position and much nearer than this man was. He managed to crawl over to this tank, on which the gun would still work, and he hoisted himself in and began firing at the enemy. Every moment or so a shell burst near him and the enemy began to concentrate on him. After a while his firing stopped. Nobody will ever find out who he was. I saw another brave thing, too. When the Germans dug in those anti-tank guns near our leaguer and we sallied forth right into them, one tank wouldn't start and its gun jammed. Its officer then seized a Bren gun, jumped out of the tank and charged the Germans. He has never been seen since. It was dark at the time—tracer, 37 mm., was criss-crossing this way and that." He continued: "I'll write a book after this war on the right constituency of an armoured brigade—I don't think we've got it yet." During our talk, he said this: "I have been so frightened during the last few days that I don't think I can be frightened any more." And again: "The Germans twice came on my radio telling me where to leaguer. I said: 'Can you identify yourself?' No reply."

A padre came over to talk to me—a friend of General Gott's. He said Gott reads his Bible for ten minutes every day. The night before the

recent " flap " (when Rommel's men drove through our lines) Gott picked up the Bible, opened at random and read the parable of the foolish virgins. He said to the padre, " Sam, I regard the foolish virgins as great administrative bunglers. I hope I am not going to have great administrative trouble to-morrow." " And," said the padre, " we had ! " The padre added that he'd never known a division of troops so religious-minded.

At 3 p.m. we set off for the 4th Armoured Brigade. The U.S.A. tanks with us were fairly scooting along. I am amused by the way men say, " We'd a party there," meaning a battle. When it was particularly bloody, they say: " Quite a party." When we have battered the enemy, they say: " We gave him a knock."

To-day I shaved in tea—not a success. The lads had made the tea so sweet that the stuff stuck to my face. However, I persevered and got through. But—not again.

On the way forward we saw many derelict vehicles again—tanks, etc. An armoured car was tilted up and, beside it, a small wooden cross. A blackened and burnt tank was German. One sees our men driving about occasionally in German or Italian vehicles.

We arrived at Brigadier A. H. Gatehouse's H.Q. quite safely; an array of vehicles of all sorts was scattered about—square miles of them—and on the far edge we descried a few tanks and armoured cars flying pennants on their aerials—aerials like thin saplings bent backwards in a strong wind. We drove through and walked the last hundred yards. The Brigadier was busy talking; he was wearing a white Hebron sheepskin coat down to his knees, black field-boots, his blue beret and a spotted blue silk neckerchief. Shouts greeted me—first from the top of an armoured car, where were seated Major Weyman of the 11th Hussars and another officer. I had lunched and bathed with them some months ago. A young artillery officer came up who had driven me to contact Major Cavanagh of the Royal Horse Artillery—also some months ago. I was among old friends. The scene was almost gay. The 11th Hussars were wearing their chocolate beres, Weyman had a fur collar to his coat, other officers on H.Q. staff walked about in scarlet forage caps or caps of green and gold. A Lieutentant-Colonel of the Northumberland Hussars carried a shooting stick. Near the H.Q. tank a lad was shaving and another making tea. The smaller of the tank guns had brilliant blue oilskin covers. Fighting was still going on. On our left and a little to our rear, the artillery were pounding away, their flashes darting into the air. On the left front, some hundreds of yards away, an Italian tank was smouldering (the artillery had knocked about fifteen such tanks out that

morning). Out of sight in front was a *wadi* (gorge), with the Italians beyond it. The brigadier stood with his map in its transparent glazed case and explained the situation. The Italians had put up a white flag not long before, we had gone forward to take them prisoners, whereupon they had started firing again. We had dealt suitably with that treachery, I gathered. As we talked, fourteen R.A.F. machines came over in formation, roaring like a goods train. Not long after that, a lone German Heinkel flew overhead and at once a good deal of tracer was fired at him—you saw the red shells climbing the sky—they seemed to soar slowly—trying to make contact with the aircraft. Several missed narrowly. It looked a contest of pure skill—the fact that, did the shell hit the aircraft, a man would die didn't occur to any of us, I imagine. War is constantly like that. Here we were, in the midst of a kind of battle—on our far right, unseen, the South Africans were attacking an escarpment, on our left flank and to the rear about forty-seven tanks of the German 15th Armoured Division were waiting their opportunity to pounce. It was approaching four o'clock and the Brigadier went to his radio to say: "Alec talking. This is the tricky period"—and it was. Yet the atmosphere was as carefree and buoyant and free from strain as though we had been attending a point to point race. The Brigadier, burly, steady, talking in his slow, quiet fashion, was as a first-class physician in a sick-room. Not that anybody was sick. Somebody called out, as the guns flashed: "There goes steel spaghetti for the Italians." The Brigadier said: "We're sitting pretty at the moment unless their 15th Armoured Division attacks. Anyhow, we are ready for 'em." He had been placed in command of the remnants of the 4th and 22nd Brigades and had over a hundred tanks—and more were coming. He said they had fought one battle each day and sometimes two since the offensive started, and he wouldn't be surprised if some of his lads fell asleep as they drove back to leaguer that night. He hadn't changed his shirt or socks or pants for thirteen days. But he was in great spirits. "The tank fire coming back at us when we attack is less, and they run when our fire gets among 'em." I asked him how long he thought this battle would go on. He said: "I think it's all a question of morale. I hesitate to say how long it will last. We had three days of good manœuvring battle in the beginning. One night we shot up about 3,000 enemy M.T.—it was clear moonlight. After it was over one of our chaps put out an order, 'I'm rallying on the moon,' and everybody rallied on him—it was beautifully done, like a parade-ground."

We were talking three miles from Sidi Rezegh, which has changed hands so often. A message came to say that our patrols there were being attacked by German Mark III. tanks. A moment later two German prisoners walked by, one wounded—both Ack-Ack gunners from a Panzer division. Behind me, Captain Hector Chadwick (a two-handicap man; he'd played the best ball of the Brigadier and me and we'd

finished all-square) with the neb of his cap broken, face unshaven, was smiling his whimsical grin, and explaining where that night's leaguer would be. He was saying " Uncle Tom Cobley and B Echelon and all—goes there "—indicating a spot with his blue pencil. A few nights earlier Chadwick had been captured by the enemy and crawled on his hands and knees 1,000 yards to safety; after that, walking fifteen or twenty miles across the desert.

Reports continued to come in—" Freddie reports creeping up on the Ities, who're having a cup of tea "—to which the Brigadier gave an appropriate reply. He would say from time to time: " David, tell so and so to do that," or " Bill, what's coming in from such and such a place ? " —it was intimate and friendly and half-jovial. They called the American tanks " Honeys "; they said this was their quietest afternoon. But the afternoon before I arrived the Brigadier had experienced some awkward moments when his radio instrument went wrong and the giving of orders became almost impossible at the very moment the German 21st Armoured Division was carrying out important moves. However, we got through right enough. I heard how Captain Robert Crisp, the South African bowler, has had six tanks " shot under him." and had accounted for six medium enemy tanks and a number of anti-tank guns. Crisp has developed a technique with his driver of saying: " Stop ! " while he fires the gun, and then saying " On ! " It takes him only four seconds to stop, fire and go on again. He has been twice wounded. Another officer, now badly burned, has also had six tanks " shot under him." How remarkable this is, that a man should escape extreme peril so often !

This afternoon elements of the 21st Armoured Division were on our right with the King's Dragoon Guards attacking them in armoured cars.

Another remark of the Brigadier's sticks in my mind: that he has never had such fine co-operation with artillery—their observers come right up and sit in his tanks. On some nights the tanks have fought their battles till 9 p.m., but more usually they've ended at dusk. On this night, about dusk, orders were given that our patrols could gradually loosen contact. But about the same time news arrived that General Freyburg was being heavily attacked at Sidi Rezegh and all our artillery were requested to assist him. But alas ! it couldn't be done—night was falling too fast and observation was impossible, and shooting without observation equally impossible.

Presently we prepared to move back into leaguer—the name for this tight wedge of transport guarded by tanks and armoured cars and infantry outposts in which we put so many of our eggs into one basket. (The Germans do the same.) One stands in the midst of the mass and reflects on what damage one or two bombs could do, but, happily, one knows, too, how in this chartless desert it is a thousand to one against our leaguer being discovered—though once or twice they *have* been

found, as we have found the enemy's. One or two spluttering flares were shot up before we moved, presumably to guide stragglers in. And, finally, off we set with such a clanking and creaking and rumbling as this horde of grey monsters—many astonishingly like warships—moved in the night that you'd have thought several heavy goods trains were clanking through Clapham Junction. The stars were out by this time and the moonlight was white and incandescent. We drove in, took up our place and I got out my bed. No use being sleepless or uncomfortable; but I didn't put up my tent—the move might have to be sudden. I walked about in the moonlight, found Major Weyman dividing up among his men the contents of a German 3-ton lorry they had captured—first-rate chocolate, cheese in large metal tubes (as though it were toothpaste), brown bread, onions, cylinders of *Sauerkraut*, and so forth. A voice in the moonlight was saying: "Go easy with that," and a reply was made: "You're the easiest thing on two —— legs." Weyman said they're growing expert at capturing lorries "alive"—they now wave, which makes the enemy think we are friends.

I called on friends in the artillery—one major said he'd been in France and Greece and this was the first campaign he has really enjoyed. It is strange that a fighting man can survive so many wars. (I'm told that our casualties in this present offensive, so far, are only a few thousand—one good thing about this sort of war. We lost some 50,000 or 60,000 on the first day of the Battle of the Somme.) We found a detachment of the Scots Guards, too, and took a whisky and water with them, sharing the enamel mug. The Brigadier, walking about in his white coat, told me of our incorrigible Mr. Atkins giving German prisoners cigarettes; and of how one of our scouting cars came on a group of German Ack-Ack, who surrendered to him. When our chap turned his back, however, they leapt on him and in the scramble he was shot in the thigh. His driver thereupon, with much presence of mind, drove his car over two of the Germans—who once more surrendered. (I described this incident in a despatch, but the Censor crossed it out—said it was not the sort of thing we wanted to say !—which sheds some light on the vagaries of censorship.) I heard how a sergeant of the 8th Hussars was withdrawing from battle, his tank and his gun being out of action, when he saw another of our tanks hit and three men clamber out, running, only 300 yards from the enemy. He promptly turned back to rescue them and saved, not three, but four, under point-blank fire. Another sergeant, this time of the 11th Hussars, saw an armoured car knocked out and its three men wounded. "The fire was very heavy—it could be heard coming over the radio. The sergeant asked permission by wireless to go and bring them in—was told it didn't seem possible under that amount of fire, but nevertheless did go, and brought them safely in." I am conscious of the monotony in these stories, but what a superb monotony it is—the

monotony of courage and readiness to sacrifice all that a man possesses.

I turned in about ten o'clock. The sky had been lit with gun flashes from about 8.10 p.m. At times, four flares hung in the far-off sky at the same time. The Brigadier was still walking about—and he didn't get any sleep whatever on the first three nights of the offensive. He's sent off " a rocket " about the sameness of our rations, and no mail coming up. Most of this offensive has been fought on bully and biscuits—everybody is hard-up for cigarettes.

December 1st, 1941.

The battle plan has been changed overnight—our tanks are off to Sidi Rezegh to help the New Zealanders, or, rather, to tackle any German armoured forces that are taking part in the struggle for the aerodrome. Instructions came at 4 a.m. to-day. What an exacting, strenuous, self-sacrificing life this is, compared with peacetime—I mean for our soldiers. No say as to whether they would wish to go, or not. No certainty of meals. I'm making these notes just after they have moved off—it is about six o'clock. Nobody has had a cup of tea—they are going straight into battle, so far as they know. They are doing it for the twentieth or thirtieth time on the fourteenth successive day—dirty, tired, having had a score of escapes already from sudden and violent death. And yet they seem to be buoyed up by some strength of spirit. One catches a bit of it oneself. As we drove up here I felt slightly exalted, as I did when I set off on the bombing raid to Crete. Is it danger that gives power to a man, strength to his heart? He must be conscious of the dignity that lies in the hazard, in knowing that no man can do more than he is doing. The gaiety is surprising. A few moments ago, the Lieutenant-Colonel of Northumberland Hussars was walking about in a woollen cap with a white woollen bob on the side and he had a blanket wrapped round him which looked at a casual glance like a dressing-gown. A man came up, saluted and said: " Brigadier moving off, sir," and the Colonel waddled off cheerfully. I had been able to give him a few cigarettes, for I am better supplied, having but lately come from civilisation, and his delight was immense. The Brigadier had come over earlier to shake hands. " I shouldn't come too close," he said. " I'm going in a tank."

It was a fine sight—that of our tanks moving off like grey ironclads, moving towards a purple horizon—two regiments, one on the right, the other on the left, with our motorised artillery following behind. A lonely star hung in the west. The sun came up on the desert littered with debris and glinted on petrol tins left lying about; there was a touch of Hampstead Heath in it, the morning after a Bank Holiday. I found a broken shovel with blade intact—may be useful if we have to dig. At 7.10 we heard the first thuds and at 8.50 the battle appeared to be joined, judging by the cannonading. We drove back towards Battle H.Q. to

send off despatches and at 12.20 p.m. about twenty-five dive-bombers arrived half a mile away and began their playful devilry. I saw no Ack-Ack opposition. This warfare is akin to naval, not only in its manœuvres, but in the need for scattered detachments having their own protection, as a ship has its guns. Every cluster of transport needs its guns, every convoy needs its guns. They do not always possess them—maybe they cannot possess them, short as we are. One begins to feel the infantry are little use, that they are outmoded—certainly against tanks they are almost powerless. It seems to me that every infantry battalion needs its own anti-tank guns—not anti-tank rifles, but guns. We need some better fashion of establishing identity—on at least three occasions our own troops have been bombed by our own aircraft.

I can now say something more authoritative about the work of the 4th Armoured Brigade, which bore much of the brunt in the desert fighting from November 18th to December 20th, and perhaps it may be conveniently inserted here. This was a brigade using the American tanks. I have a drawing which shows the evolutions and convolutions of the brigade's activities during the thirty-two days in question. Not every day did the brigade fight its tanks, but, on the other hand, there were a few days when they fought twice or thrice. Sometimes they fought until nine or ten o'clock at night, and on many occasions, of course, they had to march after dark. The geometric design created by the brigade's movements amounts to between 700 and 800 miles, but one of the reconnaissance tanks showed on its speedometer over 2,000 miles. Speeds, when in pursuit of the enemy, were attained of over thirty-five miles an hour.

There is no doubt that our men proved themselves, man for man, superior to the enemy during this time. There is no doubt, also, that they showed—as has been shown in other fields, notably the air—that human nature can achieve feats of endurance that would have been pronounced impossible only a few years ago. It is not long ago that four days' tank fighting would have been said to be the maximum time men could endure. Ten days' such fighting may have been achieved in Russia. It is doubtful if, ever before, tank men have operated for thirty-two days without withdrawing from the battle area. They did not continue for that length of time without growing tired, and in many cases, extremely exhausted. After eight days it was common enough, on night movements, for drivers to fall asleep (it became the custom for an officer to go from tank to tank, during halts, to ensure that drivers were awake and ready to move again.) This exhaustion of drivers and crews raises the question, which has been raised to me by doctors in our destroyers, of the need for some ready and handy stimulant in tablet form. There's no doubt, in my view, that our forces need it. This is no question of using " dope "; it's a matter of using some common-sense, harmless stimulant that will

temporarily reinvigorate a man, keep him awake, and clear his mind. In most fighting there comes a time when he can relax, and if, after taking such a stimulant, there is a reaction, it is worth (in my opinion) paying the price of reaction for the benefit obtained during the actual fighting. The Germans, I believe, use some variant of benzidrene.

On the first three days the 4th Armoured Brigade was engaged in purely tank *versus* tank battles; after that they were more usually going to the aid of our troops when the latter were hard-pressed, or they were pursuing reported enemy columns (which sometimes, perhaps not unnaturally, turned out to be our own). But in those first three days there was time and opportunity to note the enemy tactics, in which there was not much new. His commonest method was to form a solid phalanx with his lightest tanks in front, his Mark IIIs, with their 50-mm. guns next, and his Mark IVs, with their 75-mm. guns, behind. Thus each succeeding wave could shoot over the heads of the waves in front. He would advance with tanks spread over a front of some 500 yards, 30 yards between each tank, and some 300 or 400 yards between each wave. He showed little boldness or imagination. He would, quite naturally and rightly, try to get a position in which he was " hull down " and wait for us to come on. That is almost an ideal way to fight your tanks—choose your excellent position and wait to be attacked. Stationary, your shooting is good—clearly better than shooting on the move. Our plan was usually to manœuvre and force him to split his forces, which he would do, into two parts when threatened from two directions. If, then, we had a third regiment of tanks with which to attack from a third direction he would generally withdraw. If not, he would change position in order to face our fire with his heaviest armour.

It is well-known by this time that our tanks carried smaller guns of shorter range than the enemy Mark IIIs or Mark IVs. Rommel could shoot at us for several hundred yards before we could fire at him. (Our calibre was 37 mm.) This was a heavy disadvantage to labour under, and our tank commanders and their men did extremely well to win the successes they did. The situation was that we had more tanks, but lighter ones—that we showed manœuvre and dash while he remained, when he could, pretty well fixed. But, of course, he was not always fixed; he attacked also. The American tanks were good; in some respects it was the most serviceable tank our British Army has fought with. It was called by us a " cruiser," but it is doubtful if its weight and size quite merited that description. But it stood up to punishment better than anybody, I think, expected. It took hits that might have been expected to knock it out, and often it was not knocked out. A few of our officers or men, on the other hand, had as many as seven tanks " shot under them " and still continued fighting. Sometimes men able to leave one disabled tank have immediately gone and clambered into another. Sometimes those men were so exhausted at night that they fell

down alongside their tank and fell asleep without troubling or caring enough to pull blankets over them—and it was bitterly cold at night. The Brigade Commander changed his clothes only once in thirty-two days; the men didn't change at all. For everybody bully and biscuits was the staple diet.

The largest force of enemy tanks that the brigade encountered at one time was 100. This was on November 19th. Enemy losses are always difficult to compute, but on the 19th we knew of nineteen enemy put out of action for certain and probably twenty-six others, with, in addition, nine armoured troop-carriers. On the second day we estimated we had destroyed thirty tanks. I believe it's true to say that at no time during the thirty-two days was our armoured brigade forced to withdraw; such withdrawals as there were, were made to occupy more favourable tactical positions.

I have had the benefit of reading Brigadier Gatehouse's[1] notes; he doesn't hesitate to set down some of our needs, some of the lessons we learnt, or ought to have learnt. One is the need for direct communication between armoured brigades and the Air Force—*direct*. Going through division, corps and army is too slow, too cumbersome. "Why not have," he asks, "an R.A.F. officer with a R.T. [radio telephone] with each brigade?" He speaks firmly, too, of the need for being able to replenish tank supplies by air in the most advanced positions, especially if those positions are behind the enemy lines (as, in fluid and open fighting, they may well be). He makes many other points of less general interest—points technical and military, such as that constant firing on the move wastes a good deal of ammunition—holds that it is better to use speed to get to a favourable fire position and then to halt and fire.

He doubts the wisdom of making moves at night, pointing out how long they take and how exhausting they are. To move five miles over poor terrain—and bogs, rocks and slit trenches abounded—might easily take two or three hours. He advocates starting at first light and using a good economical speed. He stresses the need for some reliable device for rallying after dark. Firing Very light signals or tracer bullets to indicate positions is obviously dangerous in giving away one's own position. (Yet the enemy do this frequently and recklessly.) The answer to the problem is probably an increased use of directional wireless, not yet exploited by us to the full. Point is given to the danger of light signals by the fact that on November 22nd it was the firing of such a signal after dark which led to Brigade H.Q. being attacked and overrun by thirty enemy tanks.

The Brigade Commander goes on to say—what seems to me of the highest importance—that when the enemy has heavier tanks than ours, it can play into his hands to attack him whenever and wherever we find him. We have a natural desire to attack and exterminate him, and that

[1] Since promoted Major-General.

can lead us into impetuosity. The tendency to make an old-fashioned, frontal attack is understandable. " Simplicity, old boy, and again simplicity." But what we want is subtlety and brains and subterfuge and skill—allied to our natural courage. The enemy will attack when he must, but nothing pleases him so well as to fix himself in a good, hull-down position—and wait for us. We need to choose our moment and place and method of attack with great thought and skill. " If," says the Brigade Commander, " a strong armoured force can be maintained athwart his lines of communication, he'll be so angry he'll do something about it "—and possibly, one may add, something ill-advised.

The need for camouflaging all tanks, the need for more, and efficient, wireless equipment in tanks (lack of the latter slowed down action and manœuvre more than once)—these need no emphasis. We cannot afford, if we can possibly avoid it, to have officers going round under fire giving orders because the wireless doesn't work. Breakdowns are inevitable; they occur in enemy ranks just as in ours (let us hope they occur oftener), but this is a war, more than most others, in which good mechanical work and maintenance saves lives; and we must try to remember it. In this sense, makers of radio sets at home might conceivably be the cause of a battle being won, or being lost.

The Commander pays the highest tributes to the work of the artillery. The co-operation he received from the Royal Horse Artillery, who used tanks as their Forward Observation Posts, and from the armoured car regiment, who gave him the most valuable information on patrol, has seldom, in his experience, been equalled. His gratitude is deep, as, indeed, it is to all who served him.

The 4th Armoured Brigade moved off on November 18th at 5.30 a.m. through the wire on the Libyan frontier, and apart from support given to the King's Dragoon Guards, who were ahead doing patrol work, the Brigade moved without interference. The first fighting developed in the afternoon of the next day about 3.35 p.m. (The enemy were always eager to get the sun behind them.) About 100 enemy tanks were seen moving south-west on a track from Gabr Saleh to Sidi Azziz, and fighting developed quickly and heavily. The principal action was fought at short range—some 400 yards and occasionally much nearer—by the 8th Hussars and later in the afternoon by the 5th Tank Regiment at longer range. During the fight 4th Brigade H.Q. was shelled and was forced to move in a small circle, north, then east and south. As darkness fell, the battle ceased. We had lost a number of tanks and the enemy far more—almost certainly over forty. (I have been at pains to ask about the wounded. It seems one ambulance is attached to each tank regiment, and, of course, one doctor and his staff. This ambulance is never further away than Brigade H.Q., and Brigade H.Q. is always in sight of the battle. Obviously tank wounded are a difficult problem. Each tank carries on the outside a light stretcher of bamboo and canvas.

When the need arises this can be got inside the tank—it must be extremely difficult—and the wounded man placed on it, the canvas folded over him, the thing laced up and the wounded man lifted out. But this is the solution at its best. When a shell pierces a tank and the tank catches fire—and fire is one of the risks—chances of escape are not high. Tank men are commonly strongly-built men. One officer who lost his foot was placed on the ground; he fixed his own tourniquet on. The Germans captured the ground and him, and a German officer gave him a blanket. He lay there all night. Next morning the German leaguer, which had been most orderly, was plunged into sudden confusion and tanks and M.T. scattered in all directions. They had heard our 4th Armoured Brigade was about to attack them—which was true. The 4th Brigade took the ground and picked up this officer. He is now recovering.)

The following day, November 20th, fighting continued on and off from first light till last light. At 6.50 a.m. the 5th Tank Regiment reported forty enemy tanks in front of them, and thirty-five minutes later were engaging them. Forty minutes later, thirty-two enemy tanks were working round the left flank of the 3rd Tank Regt., and our artillery were pounding away with vigour. Our tank ammunition situation was at that time one wherein care had to be exercised, and at 8.40 a.m. orders were given that not a single round must be wasted. Twenty minutes later enemy fire decreased and they appeared to be withdrawing, with our tanks following, maintaining contact. At 10 a.m. the enemy had withdrawn two and a half miles from our forward patrols and the Brigade advanced till it occupied position Bir Bu Meliha. It can be readily imagined that this was not a morning when anybody ate a normal breakfast; nor was there much respite, for at noon it was learned that the German Armoured Divisions, the 15th and the 21st, had joined forces and that an attack could be expected at noon. In fact, however, although every minute was charged with a certain excitement, our tanks were not in action again till 4.10 p.m. (Once more one notes the German endeavour to attack with the early evening sun behind them). Their attack was fiercer than the previous day's.

The 22nd Armoured Brigade, which had intended reinforcing the 4th, was kept fully occupied by forty enemy tanks at Gabr Saleh. The battle the 4th Brigade was fighting became confused, and as light faded the enemy broke off contact and withdrew. How stilted and dull this sort of account sounds and how much imagination is required to fill in the details of these terrible machines shelling one another—some at close quarters, some at half a mile distance, till some are split open, and some catch fire and blaze in red flame and black smoke and the air is full of the stink of cordite and burning oil—and things worse. Dust and clouds of sand mingle with smoke, and the ear is deadened and deafened by the cannonade, and shells ricochet and bounce and scream in various directions. The fact that a man has a steel shell round him may cause him to

feel safer than if he were in the midst of a barrage on his two feet, but even so it is a fearful ordeal.

On November 21st, the enemy withdrew at 4 a.m. and at 7 a.m. (soon after dawn) we moved on towards Bir Bu Meliha. Four hundred enemy M.T. were reported and the 3rd and 5th Tank Regts. moved round their left flank while the 22nd Brigade attacked their head. Prisoners were taken. A lull followed till the late afternoon. Always the late afternoon seems to have been tank-battle time. At 4.15 the 8th Hussars attacked fifty enemy M.T., but, doing so, ran on to enemy anti-tank guns. About the same time, our artillery got into difficulties in boggy ground at Bir Reghem.

The next day was one in which obscurity and confusion had their place. It throws valuable light on how fluid and swiftly changing events could be and on how important correct information is. Plans were made to attack, at first light, an enemy leaguer (i.e. his assembly of tanks and M.T.), but this leaguer was not in the expected position and was not, indeed, found. A good deal of bogging of vehicles occurred. At 1.20 p.m. the Brigade was ordered to Sidi Rezegh Aerodrome, there to assist the 7th and 22nd Brigades, which were being strongly attacked, but when the 4th Brigade arrived after its journey of some six miles, the position—as in many tank battles—was difficult accurately to assess. This airfield lies in a depression, was littered with derelict vehicles or aircraft, and the scene was partly hidden by smoke and dust. The 7th Armoured Division Support Group, led by Brigadier "Jock" Campbell, D.S.O. (later given the V.C. for his work that day), was very much on the scene. Artillery and tanks were pounding away. Not an easy battle wherein to join, But, of course, the 4th Armoured Brigade did join in, attacking the Germans, with the 5th Tank Regt. on the right and the 3rd Tank Regt. on the left. The engagement went on fiercely. Just before dark, the enemy put down a smokescreen in front of the British Support Group to cover an infantry attack by them, whereupon the two tank battalions were immediately ordered in front of the gun-line. By this time it was most difficult to see and the tank regiments rallied after darkness had fallen. In the meantime, Brigade H.Q. (minus the Commander, who was with the fighting tanks) had been ordered to rally two miles to the east, but in so doing they saw a large enemy column approaching which held both tanks and guns. Under heavy fire from these, Brigade H.Q., together with the 8th Hussars, were forced to withdraw. After three miles, the enemy column halted and our Brigade H.Q. formed a tight leaguer, together with the 8th Hussar tanks, anti-tank guns and so forth. While this was being done, the Brigade Commander was moving from the fighting tanks to his H.Q. to bring the latter into unity with the former. Very lights had been shot into the dark sky to guide him, but when he was some 400 yards from his H.Q. he received over his radio the voice of his G. 3 (Captain Hector Chadwick) saying, " I don't think

I should come any closer, sir. I think we're surrounded." He replied, " Thanks very much," and set off in his tank to bring the needed additional strength. The H.Q. were indeed surrounded and were being, in fact, considerably overrun by thirty enemy tanks. They had seen those Very lights and rightly concluded that there a British force was.

The enemy drove into our leaguer and began to fire 50-mm. shells and S.A.A. into our massed vehicles, some of which were soon blazing. A Brigadier, several Staff officers and a number of the 8th Hussars were captured. A Colonel of the Northumberland Hussars described to me some days later how he heard a voice behind him saying, " Hands up ! " in English, but with a German accent. This was his first intimation that something was amiss. He, however, decided to make a dash for it, jumped into a car and drove through the enemy tanks without being hit. Captain Chadwick crawled 1,000 yards on his hands and knees to safety and walked fifteen miles across the desert till he encountered some of our own troops. Others had similar remarkable adventures and escapes.[1]

The Brigade Commander had returned to the 5th Tank Regt. south of Sidi Rezegh, and with these set off for the H.Q. leaguer once more. It was intensely dark, going was difficult, and it was close on ten o'clock when large enemy columns were found, with which fierce fighting began. Tanks and anti-tank guns were firing at each other at 100 yards' distance; shells hurtled through the darkness like flaming meteors. Both we and the enemy suffered losses. Late that night fighting died down and eventually contact was established with the 3rd Tank Regt. Brigade H.Q. leaguer was not found again. This night-battle was the first in which we experienced the use of parachute flares used by the enemy " antagonistically ": when at close range they were fired up and over our tanks the bright lights silhouetted our tanks in an alarming manner and half blinded us.

The re-organisation of the Brigade H.Q., its vehicles, supplies, equipment, personal baggage, and so forth being lost, was not easy. Communications for the next day or two were uncertain also. On November 23rd, the 3rd Tank Regt. spent a good deal of the day defending its leaguer; friend and foe were very mixed. On this and the next day attempts to establish links with 7th Armoured Division failed; for two days no replenishment of tanks had occurred (i.e. with petrol, ammunition and rations) but so firmly was the Brigade knitting itself together that when, at 4 p.m. that day, 4,000 enemy M.T. were reported to have been seen moving south near Bir el Haat, a long chase immediately

[1] In fact, Captain Chadwick and a corporal, who had met him during his night walk, found themselves at first light within an enemy leaguer, but by removing their hats, they were able to walk out without trouble.

began at a speed of not less than thirty-five miles an hour and often faster. The Brigade attacked in three coloumns and drove into the enemy's tail, splitting it asunder. It had been a long chase and it was bright moonlight in which some of the fighting occurred. The enemy broke off in all directions—one column of 2,000 M.T. turned east. (This is believed to be the column which Rommel himself is thought to have led, driving through our lines, reaching the frontier wire, running up to Scherfersen and north to the Trigh Capuzzo before he turned west again. How deliberate this move was and how far it was dictated by the onslaught on his larger 4,000 M.T. column by the 4th Armoured Brigade will remain in doubt). German and Italian tanks and lorries were set on fire, prisoners surrendered, and a sort of glorious chaos occurred in the enemy columns. The 4th Brigade was, in a sense, revenged and recompensed for the loss of its H.Q.

The following day was spent in moving south to the assistance of a South African Brigade being menaced by enemy tanks at Taib el Esem. Forty-two tanks were encountered, including Mark IVs, Mark IIIs, Italian M.13s and a few of our Mark II " I " tanks. The South Africans were effectually guarded from this mechanical menace, and so grateful that they made for the tank men the best coffee the latter had ever drunk. They needed it. Eight days' fighting had left the tank men so exhausted that from time to time a driver would fall fast asleep. Next day, for the first time, the Brigade enjoyed a few hours' rest and maintenance; shortage of enquipment had been making manœuvre slow and difficult. The Brigade moved at 1 p.m. to Bir Berraneb, where, in mid-afternoon, a detachment of the 8th Hussars arrived with thirty-six " recovered " tanks. (This recovery and repair of tanks is an important part of tank fighting; the Germans are highly expert at it; their mechanics have usually been kept nearer to actual battle than ours—which is not our mechanics' fault.) That afternoon a small enemy column was pursued to Bir el Gubi and three M.13s destroyed.

Fighting occurred on each of the three succeeding days, but the battles were less weighty than some which had preceded them. The first day we attacked a column that was strongly guarded by anti-tank guns at Bir Benid. The day after we were defending ourselves from an attack delivered on the junction of the 4th and 22nd Armoured Brigades; it was a long-sustained attack, but not a very powerful one. Our artillery co-operated and a direct hit of theirs blew a German tank to pieces. On November 30th the 4th Brigade absorbed the 22nd Brigade, with its A.13s, A.10s and A.19s, an A.C.V. (armoured command vehicle) and signal personnel. For eight days the 4th Brigade H.Q. had consisted of one tank and one rear link, together with one armoured car. The Brigadier had been sleeping on the ground with a couple of blankets. On this day I joined the 4th Brigade in the afternnon. They were

engaged near Bir Reghem, fighting part of the Italian Arriète Division. The Brigade's notes say: " This was a very pleasant day, during which nineteen M.13s were destroyed and set on fire." (I have described my visit on pages under that day's date.)

The next day was a strenuous one. I saw the Brigade move off, breakfastless, to Sidi Rezegh to assist the New Zealanders. Our tanks crossed the aerodrome under heavy shellfire and moved down the escarpment to the New Zealand leaguer, where many vehicles were burning. On reaching the pass up the escarpment, the New Zealanders were heavily shelled from the south and south-east and had to move with rapidity. 4th Brigade H.Q. now came under shelling and a tank attack from the south and south-west. There were moments when the Brigade was almost surrounded, but after stiff fighting they extricated themselves safely. On the following two days no fighting took place; ten new tanks arrived and were put into shape. Crews, too, often needed some last-minute instruction. Working new tanks and crews into the ranks of seasoned veterans is not an easy business. The day which followed was extremely active. In the neighbourhood of Hagfet el Gueitinat some thirty tanks and a 100 M.T. were discovered, and of these eight M.13 tanks were knocked out and about forty M.T. destroyed. At 3.40 p.m. orders were received to move with all speed to help one of our columns said to be in difficulties, but happily, when the Brigade arrived at its destination, the column was not in any predicament.

By this time the back of the enemy tank resistance was beginning to be broken. Our tanks—when they found and engaged the enemy—had things more their own way. On December 5th we found nine M.13s abandoned, together with two anti-tank guns, all duly destroyed by us. Twenty tanks and seventy M.T. were met, but they made off hastily in two columns. On December 7th the 4th Brigade fought hard all day south-west of Gubi. (It had now received reinforcements.) The enemy concentration was of all arms and held forty-two German tanks screened by anti-tank guns. We accounted for at least two German Mark IV tanks, three Mark III, eight others were probably knocked out, and twenty-seven more got direct hits. One 50-m.m. anti-tank gun was put out of action, and the German tanks which remained able to move retreated. The following day enemy were once more found. Again they had chosen a strong position, but in fighting continuing through the day our R.H. Artillery did most excellent work. Our tank losses were negligible and for that price we inflicted serious losses in enemy infantry, much M.T., two medium tanks and an anti-tank gun.

Our army was now moving west more rapidly, driving the enemy before them, or striving to maintain contact with forces in retreat. On December 9th the Brigade marched fast towards Bir Lefa, where a ridge was attacked strongly held by tanks and guns. At 4 p.m.—how consistently this was a time for fighting—twenty enemy tanks advanced along

the valley towards the west. The battle became intense, but the range was long and before a decision was reached darkness came down. There followed a day when Stukas attacked our tanks without much success and then a period came of driving towards the west, once or twice covering fifty or sixty miles in a day. No further major battles occurred, but on the 16th December a detachment succeeded in getting within sight of the H.Q. of the German 15th Armoured Division and destroyed four tanks. On December 17th, the 4th Armoured Brigade moved ninety miles to a position well west of the remaining German armour, but, owing to the immense difficulty of what is called " marrying up " the replenishment vehicles with the fighting echelons, a partial withdrawal to meet the supply column had to be made next day. However, from enemy commanders it seems that this threat of an armoured force against their lines of communication was the main cause for Rommel's hasty and, in some cases, rather disorganised withdrawal.

About December 20th the Brigade handed over its responsibilities to other armoured formations; and there for the moment I must leave them. I'm conscious that this is but an arid account of what was the most sustained and perhaps the fiercest tank fighting British troops have, as yet, engaged in.

December 2nd, 1941.

We are now back at Rear H.Q., where Lt.-Col. Philip Astley has a tent —but there are no tents for the correspondents, no protection from the elements except their cars, nowhere to work except their cars. Feeling extremely irritable, I told Astley, who is an exceedingly nice person, generous, thoughtful, that we are the worst-found and most ill-provided-for folk in the desert; that I've seen, everywhere I've gone, officers with canvas sheets that can be fixed on cars, or with tents that can be easily rigged up. All along we've been told that tents were impossible—that they would draw bombing. But tents and lorries are all over the place, and the more important a man is, the more comfortable he is. It's ridiculous that we should work under such discomfort. Discomfort achieves nothing except illness and banishes correspondents back to Cairo. (It was bitterly cold last night and we had some rain this morning.) Astley said my criticism was very sweeping to bring out suddenly—which was no doubt a just remark, but I said mine was a considered view. Nobody else said a word.

An American correspondent quoth: " The best story I wrote, I invented—my tank hero was lost for four days, and Oh, boy, what didn't happen to him during that time ! Churchill complimented me on it.

But if they want to give that tank chap the V.C.—and he certainly deserved it—I shall be sunk."

Astley recommended us to sleep close to our trucks—one recent night our tanks drove across the camp, breaking a colonel's back.

December 3rd, 1941.

To-day I flew back to Cairo—a hail of wind and rain at Buggush, and I very glad to have left the desert for the moment. An Australian Colonel next me was busy putting back the metal numeral " Australia " on his shoulder-strap. We set off about noon and, as it promised to take some four hours (and did), I got hungry. Half-way during a halt I asked if there were any Army biscuits on the aircraft. They gave me two brown rolls which I was very glad of. But few others got anything. This aircraft, on which every pound is important for weight considerations, was carrying a pair of field-boots and their wooden trees ! Damned impudence. At Heliopolis we had to wait for a truck to take us to the taxi-rank. Our kit was on the ground near the path. A second aircraft flew down with some generals or suchlike in and the driver of a staff car became so (presumably) excited that he drove over my kit, damaging my typewriter and buckling my rucksack.

A Lieutenant-Colonel was saying on the aircraft: " Everything is vague—it's a vague war. Winston pitched it too high—too much optimism in the beginning." This accords with much opinion—but it may be wrong. We've had our setbacks, but so has the enemy. We're fighting on his territory and have written off much of his armour.

December 7th, 1941.

I had a talk with General X. to-day—he agreed with me that we are an improvident lot—said among other things, that Army training didn't satisfy him. He listened to me and then said: " You are very critical, aren't you ? But then you are Lancashire "—as if that accounted for everything. I am reminded of the uproariously rude Yorkshire women who let-off the most appalling broadsides and then say: " You see, I'm Yorkshire."

His secretary tells me they've been sent a stove—but no oil !

My colleague from the Far East describes a commander out there as having an infinite capacity for dropping off to sleep in the middle of conversations—but a good man, all the same.

Despatches sent off from the desert by two Australian writers were captured by the Germans, who underlined certain portions of them.

Later, the holders were themselves captured and finally the despatches reached Cairo and were cabled to Australia.

Philip Astley asked me to-day what the number of my war correspondent's license is. It is No. 11. I said: "What number have we got to now?"—thinking it might be seventy or so. He said: "The last number I had was 327." It will soon be difficult to find a journalist who is not an accredited war correspondent.

December 9th, 1941.

Captain M., one of our conducting officers, whom I last saw going off to find 7th Armoured Division a fortnight ago, turned up here to-day—he's come out of Tobruk on a Greek ship bringing 600 German and 200 Italian prisoners. He said the stench was awful. The Greek captain spoke no English. Four armed trawlers escorted them. A trawler captain shouted, "Fish on star," meaning, they supposed, a torpedo on starboard side, but nobody was sure. Four aerial torpedoes were fired at them just before dusk—at 5.40 p.m. All missed. They did not miss, however, when fired at the ship which preceded them. On that tramp ship was the German General von Ravenstein, of their 21st Armoured Division, whom we captured some days ago. The General now had to escape in his pyjamas, and did so. On that ship, alas! were a good many stretcher cases. How horrible and ironical this is—to be saved from battle sorely wounded and then to be drowned. One feels one would go demented in the few seconds or minutes of consciousness, after knowing what had happened—and yet, perhaps, a fatalistic calm and lethargy would overcome one. Sometimes it all seems past bearing. And yet it must be borne. Last night came the news that Japan has declared war on America. What will the American Isolationists do now?

By the way, Captain M. said he had driven in a convoy for 157 miles, being run into from behind three times, had seen the leader of the convoy blown up on a minefield, had seen a German armoured car drive through the camp while he was shaving, had had to dig-in against tanks armed only with a revolver, had been in sandstorms, shell-storms, been shelled at a cross-road on which Germans throw a searchlight—and heaven knows what. He reports General von Ravenstein, a German we've captured, as expressing high admiration for the fighting qualities of the South Africans and New Zealanders, but he added the leadership of them wasn't quite so high.

My Polish host, who seldom talks of his woes, said wistfully last night (apropos my possible return to England): "I also should like to go home—but I have no home. I have nothing. On the twenty-sixth day of the war, my home was destroyed—in Warsaw. Now in Warsaw it is

forbidden to the Poles to buy charcoal or wood, and the children are forbidden to go to school; all they can do is work for the Germans, and to do that they must go to Germany. My wife's mother and sister now live in one room in Warsaw. My sister is an inspector in Poland, but she has not had one shilling since the war started. How easy for the United States to say: ' We shall be ready for war in 1943.' Meanwhile, in Europe people die."

Two nights ago I saw the *Lady Hamilton* film made by Korda. It owes nothing to me. Emma, when Nelson goes to Trafalgar, is the same slip of a girl she is in the beginning—which is about as true as saying I am still a boy. An enjoyable picture, mostly false. Vivien Leigh acts admirably, and Olivier has a good voice. But the temperamental, theatrical Horatio, a giant on his ship, but no giant off, is not there.

I've seen enough and learnt enough and heard enough now to be aware of the partial falsity of most of the despatches one writes, the omissions, the withholdings, the glossings over, the fashion in which newspapers (or most of them) delight in the highly-coloured, the array of adjectives, the " descriptive touch "; how the Censor takes out the astringent line, the correcting note that makes the difference between something like truth and untruth. And though it may be requisite for the winning of this war (for myself, I doubt it), I am sick and tired of it, or, at all events, of its masquerading as sound journalism. Call it propaganda and let it be anonymous and accepted as half-truth, yes, but as good journalism under one's name, that is another matter. All of which, I suppose, is not much more than underlining the old saying that in war truth is the first casualty.

I am very hungry these days back in Cairo. I am ready to eat four or five times a day. Maybe my body has been much starved out in the desert of many foods it needs.

A South African correspondent tells me of South African officers who were captured along with some of their men. At the end of the day they got only bread and water—nothing at all during the day. They growled about this, and particularly at the fact that their men got not even bread and water. The German reply was that the South Africans were faring precisely as the Germans themselves—German officers were getting bread and water that night and the men, nothing.

Last night I attended a concert and watched a private in the tank corps eat glass and a razor blade. He was a burly chap, about twenty-eight, black hair, round face, magnificent teeth, good-humoured—absolutely normal to look at him. He did it merely to entertain the

wounded. He took a tumbler and crunched it round the edges with his teeth, chewing it up and swallowing it down with water. He threw his head right back when he swallowed the ground-up glass. Next he took a razor blade and crunched that up also. It must be said he didn't appear to enjoy that quite so well as the glass. Finally, he tackled an electric-light bulb. That gave him difficulty—he had to break it in his mouth and it took some negotiating. At length, he broke it, but it cut the edge of his mouth a little. However, he crunched most of it up and swallowed it, again throwing back his head rather as some divers do the moment their heads bob out of the water and they shake it like a dog. He told a friend of mine that he's been doing this for seventeen years. Before the war began he was a circus turn, eating this stuff two or three times a day. He confessed that there are times when, after eating glass thrice a day, he doesn't feel very well.

December 11th, 1941.

To-day I came to Alexandria to spend a few days with the Fleet. The relief of Tobruk is as much a triumph for the Navy as for the Army—it is the Navy which has kept the fortress supplied. In October, for example, the Navy took in 2,251 tons of stores—including 32 tanks, 8 guns, a motor transport, 48 sheep, 905 tons of ammunition, 160 tons of petrol, and 13 tons of mail. The Navy have brought by sea from the desert 94,000 prisoners and have carried to and fro 37,000 personnel. Two months ago I journeyed to Tobruk on a minelayer and returned on a destroyer—my voyages almost uneventful, though not all have been, by any means. I went down to a dry dock this morning to talk to the skipper of a Norwegian whaler of 400 tons which is being repaired from shell-fire—damaged in Tobruk Harbour. Twenty shells fell close and missed, and the last one damaged her—the gun was "Bardia Bill." The skipper was a young Irishman from Cork—"A friendly neutral," he said, smiling. From a spot called Ras Azas to Tobruk has been christened "Bomb Alley"—the tricky thing in the job is to arrive at Tobruk in darkness. "We sweat blood over that," he said. Jerry has a trick of putting up recognition signals about ten miles south of Tobruk, hoping we shall reply to them—he signals in Morse, too, asking our ships to go in. One or two have been lost mysteriously, and whether they've been gulled into sailing inshore and being "walloped by gunfire," as the Irishman phrased it, nobody knows. He said that Pedlar Palmer, skipper of a schooner who has made repeated daring journeys into Tobruk, has been captured by the enemy. The Irishman described how, in order to make Tobruk at the right hour, they one night took a merchant ship in tow, but it was a wild night and the tow parted. One can imagine the scene, high bitter seas, and the small whaler gallantly dragging along the ship over twice its size, wind howling and a fitful moon, till at last the

rope snapped. But they all got there. These little ships have commonly stayed in Tobruk Harbour several days—this ship five days the last time—and the harbour can be shelled and bombed constantly, and usually is.

Since the offensive began, the little ships have not been getting their one day in harbour out of four—they've had no rest. But not one has been lost—one or two damaged since the offensive, but none lost. They've been attacked a good deal by torpedo-bombers; these aircraft fire their charges from 300 to 800 yards' distance and then turn away. They may come as low as a 100 or 150 feet to do it.

The customary several porters seized my luggage at Alexandria; no taxi could be found, so I took a gharry—pitch dark—felt in my great-coat pocket for my torch, but it had vanished—lost or stolen; also my tobacco. Drove to the hotel, trusted the hotel porter and gharry driver to bring in my few belongings, but they didn't bring in the typewriter, with which the driver departed—wittingly or unwittingly, I didn't know. I informed the police—politeness, young stout officer with an electric torch about 1 yard long and 3 inches diameter. He wrote Arabic, fast, from right to left—said he would tell every policeman in Alexandria. As I walked out I passed a small cell abutting on the corridor, a cage, with two Arabs on the floor.

However, two hours later the gharry-driver turned up at the hotel with the typewriter.

I've run into the Wimbledon young jeweller once more; tells me of a group of young officers, brainy, cultivated, most of them speaking two or three languages who are so fed-up with racketeering and our Government's behaviour that they are endeavouring to band together to racketeer themselves after the war—the notion being to form an organisation that will operate in many countries; some of them hope to be in the diplomatic service. They have influence or believe they can get influence. About forty of them. Sounds wild and incoherent.

My acquaintance lives in a small Arab village; their servant draws 50 piastres a week and is married. He was asked how much he gives his wife. He replied: "Nothing—no good give wife money." Of the 50 piastres, he hands his father 40, for which his father provides them with clothes and food and reimburses himself the £15 he paid for his son's wife. The remaining 10 piastres the son keeps for himself. The wife gets nothing at all.

My acquaintance is garnering a small fund of Arab lore; says that when an Arab has been to Mecca he engages a village artist to paint on the walls of his house objects he has seen on the journey; if you see a house decorated in that fashion you know the man has visited the shrine of the prophet.

December 12th, 1941.

An Australian officer has escaped after being a prisoner in Libya for eight days. During an air attack by our Blenheims, they were ordered into a luxurious caravan, which was von Rommel's vehicle (so they were told). It had water-tanks and a shower-bath in one corner. They were informed that during the battle he rode on the roof of a staff car with field-glasses to his eyes (?). Towards evening a very low armoured car drove up, escorted by six motor cyclists, two tanks and four armoured cars. von Rommel got out.

To-day we drove to the Yacht Club at Alexandria and attended a naval conference. The view from the Club veranda, which looks on to the harbour, was grand—the harbour crowded with warships, some in their dazzle paint, destroyers, leviathan battleships, and the workmanlike cruisers. Sailing boats tacked and broke spray at their bows and motor-launches did their best to smother themselves in foam, disappearing round warships like the scuts of rabbits going down holes. A colleague who's been a naval correspondent since the war started had a few amusing phrases—he shares a flat with a naval Lieutenant-Commander who adjures him to " throw it on the deck " or, tells him, when he's dilatory in finishing his drink, that he's " astern of station," and he's fond of muttering, " Belay there "—but I've forgotten what that means.

The naval correspondents have designed themselves a uniform to wear aboard: they've got the naval double-breasted coat and brass buttons, no badges of rank, of course, and in gold lettering on their cuff " Naval war correspondent." Their cap badge is almost the naval badge —but isn't. The American has gone one better: he's given himself two gold rings on his cuff and a star. One had a lucky escape recently: he's usually gone to sea on a big ship, but on that one occasion transferred to another because he thought he might get more excitement. The big ship he usually sailed in was sunk. I am in somewhat similar case. Had I gone with Brigadier Gatehouse to the fighting in Libya I should probably now be a prisoner of war, since his H.Q. were captured. Admittedly, half of them escaped again, but whether I should have been nimble enough, I doubt.

The naval spokesman at Alexandria, a Captain, stout, humorous, unruffled, said the Italians have now five battleships, two 8-inch cruisers, about eight 6-inch cruisers, and thirty destroyers. Their ships we damaged at Otranto are now serviceable again. The Germans are sending U-boats into the Mediterranean in increasing numbers. I inquired if he thought Hitler could reinforce von Rommel with another armoured division ? He said it would be very difficult—in order to get one across he would have to send two ; at one period we sank or otherwise destroyed

60 per cent. of all that went across. The enemy, he said, are showing greater caution, sending fewer convoys and with larger escorts of bigger ships. " I think they are afraid of going to sea," he said. Tripoli would be the port they would probably make for. The enemy have recently been sending supplies by warship. Their petrol shortage has been real.

I asked whether we should be able to use Benghazi if and when we recapture it. He said, " Yes "—after we've cleared it up. Last time we held it we tried to use it without any anti-aircraft protection, and we couldn't do it.

He was questioned on Japan's entry into the war—" these people who like to die " as an American colleague put it. (There's been talk that they flew their dive-bombers down the funnels of the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*, so to speak.) He said the Japanese seem merely to have used three waves of bombers, followed by three waves of torpedo-carrying aircraft. They had previously got hold of the neighbouring airfields, so we had probably no fighters overhead. He was asked if Japanese ships can be expected in the Red Sea. He replied he didn't think so immediately, but they would no doubt appear in the Indian Ocean, and Jibuti was always a danger.

I asked whether, if Vichy handed over the French Fleet to Hitler, that would affect the French warships lying at Alexandria? Should we take them over and could we use them? He said there were some fine ships among them, but the agreement between Admiral Cunningham and the French Admiral held good. (The French have promised not to move without informing us.) The French ships have a certain amount of fuel—enough to move outside and scuttle themselves. Certain parts of the armament have been put ashore. I suggested that living in idleness and seeing our fleet go in and out must have a demoralising effect on the Frenchmen. He laughed, and said he didn't think so—they lived on the fat of the land at our expense and seemed to be content to do it.

The use of Bizerta by the enemy would present problems to them—the consumption of fuel would be very large.

I may go to sea in a warship. I was asked: " Have you got anti-flash apparatus? " I hadn't heard of this—it seems it's desirable to tuck your trousers into your boots before you go into action, and to put on long gloves that cover half your sleeves and a woollen helmet that tucks into your jacket—all this to prevent the flash from stripping you of clothes—either the flash of your own guns or enemy blast. I was advised not to go if I shall be very sick. But who knows whether he will be sick? That depends on unpredictable weather. I've bought some anti-seasick tablets, and a fat lot of good I expect they'll be.

December 13th, 1941.

I've been reading " a true and authentic account of a naval skirmish off Sfax " last April. It was handed to me at the Naval Press Office at

Alexandria as material for an article. There was another narrative too; none is nearer us in date than June. This is the Navy's notion of publicity. Two days ago I wrote a despatch at lunch-time, but no censor was available to handle it till 5.45 p.m. However, this true and authentic account is a spirited story. It tells how four of our destroyers, *Jervis*, *Janus*, *Nubian* and *Mohawk*, went out seeking an Italian convoy and found it in moonlight, keeping no good watch and unaware of its danger. At a mile range *Jervis* opened fire, but the salvo missed—rather an anti-climax. *Janus* did better and soon *Jervis* found the range too; " this proved too much for the small enemy destroyer they were aiming at and she turned over and sank amidst a cloud of smoke and steam." During that brief encounter a hiatus had been caused in *Jervis* by the 4·7 guns being unable to depress enough. In the next phase of the action " all *Jervis's* guns appeared to be pointing and firing in different directions and peculiarly enough hitting their respective targets." (The candour of the account is refreshing.) Meanwhile all four destroyers engaged the convoy; the five merchant ships seemed to be highly inflammable and burst into flames with the utmost readiness. Two Italian destroyers ahead turned back and joined in the mêlée, now very noisy. One *Navigatore* class destroyer passed through our line close to *Jervis*, but the 4·7 guns didn't fire at her, because they were otherwise engaged, " in spite of frantic efforts of the gunnery control officer to call them to order." Soon afterwards, however, *Jervis* did hit her amidships with her 4·7s and probably aft with a torpedo; and she or a similar ship was sunk later in the action. Another destroyer of that class appeared—or it may have been the same—at all events it put up a gallant fight, and " was probably responsible for torpedoing *Mohawk* and very nearly hit *Jervis* also." The enemy's close-range weapons put up a spectacular but ineffective display, but owing to the flashless cordite it was impossible to see when their main armament was firing and their splashes rarely came close enough to impair morale. On the other hand, flames belching from British guns may well have struck terror into the hearts of the enemy. The merchant ships, though armed, did not appear to fire their guns, but resorted to attempts to ram. Both *Jervis* and *Mohawk* narrowly missed being assaulted in this way.

" Strict discipline among between-deck parties in *Jervis* was eveutually relaxed and men were allowed to go on deck one by one, each returning with a more startling tale than his predecessor of the *Blitz* and the blazing ships. The Chief timed his arrival exactly with the blowing up of an ammunition ship after being torpedoed by *Janus*. The blast knocked most people on deck flat and smartly removed tin hats from the heads of officers on the bridge. The resulting conflagration enveloped the ammunition ship and she dwelt in an inferno with ammunition detonating all round her and far above her. At last the debris started descending, the whole sea boiled and sissled and, as red-hot lumps of

ship and ammunition came pattering down, one got a good idea of Sodom and Gomorrah. The gunner by the torpedo tubes was nearly crowned by a piece of boiler-plating a yard square. Eventually all that was left of the ship was a vast column of black smoke rising up thousands of feet into the sky, and for the first time the night seemed really dark. It was learned later that a Swordfish aircraft sent out to locate the convoy was lifted bodily about 2,000 feet by the explosion, and had ammunition exploding all round her."

But *Mohawk* had been hit aft by a torpedo, and was still gallantly firing her forward guns when she was hit again amidships, took a heavy list and sank. *Jervis* found *Mohawk* wallowing about bottom upmost with *Nubian* collecting 168 survivors. About this time two enemy merchant ships, all being on fire, sank. Some Germans were in the water on a raft and as *Janus* passed at full speed they shouted, " Heil, Hitler," to which a wag on *Janus* shouted in reply: " Passing."

Subsequently it was found that the convoy had consisted mostly of ammunition, motor transport, and Germans—indeed, a large proportion of a German armoured division, together with the General, his staff and technical assistants.

Extract from another narrative: " The death of the telegraphist and his burial at Tobruk had cast a gloom over the whole ship's company of *Southern Maid*. It was the first fatal casualty . . . but the gloom had to be dispelled if they were to carry on with their usual efficiency, so that very evening they all gathered in an 8-inch turret on board the wrecked Italian cruiser *San Giorgio*, where they held a rousing concert and this restored their spirits."

An account of naval operations during the Syrian campaign describes how two French destroyers appeared of the latest type, outranging our own, over which they had ten knots margin in speed. (We ultimately sank them, however.)

The evacuation from Greece has a narrative devoted to it, from which I quote this: " At 2.45 p.m. the seventh and last attack was delivered—again by Junkers 88 diving from the direction of the sun. A near miss damaged a transport which had on board 2,400 troops. She immediately stopped, took an alarming list and reported that her engine-room was flooded and the boiler-room rapidly filling up. *Defender* (a destroyer) immediately went alongside, followed in turn by *Hereward* and *Hero*, although the transport gave every indication that she would roll on them at any moment. Together they embarked everyone on board. Except for one man who dived overboard and cracked his skull on a raft, everyone was saved, a tribute not only to the destroyers, but

to the troops' discipline, for they fell in on the upper deck and quietly waited their turn."

There was a moment in Kalamata when the Germans swept into the town, taking everyone by surprise, bursting into the offices of the naval captain (who was Sea Transport Officer), capturing him and his staff and sending them off inland. On the beaches and neighbourhood Fifth Columnists spread alarm. Germans were reported everywhere, their numbers grossly exaggerated and the situation so conflicting that clashes frequently occurred between parties of our own troops, who consisted of details belonging to several different units. At length a Lieutenant-Colonel of the R.A.S.C., deciding the German strength was much weaker than reported, organised a party of New Zealanders and Australians and some R.A.S.C. and drove the Germans from the town, taking a hundred prisoners and putting a gun and an armoured car out of action.

To-night I joined a cruiser to go to sea. The correspondents did some choosing of ships—Anderson of Reuter's said to me, " Why not come with me on *Galatea*? " I said, " Certainly—with pleasure "—but another man wished to go, so I said I didn't in the least mind—all the ships are new to me—one is as good as another. The harbour was very dark—we puffed along in a pinnace, a cloud of sparks issuing from our funnel, much to our amusement. Ships we passed hailed us and we in return yelled, " Passing ! "—though I should not have known the word from the sound—might have been Chinese. Joined the officers in the ward-room for a drink and talked with the Captain, a small brisk man about the size of Roger Keyes. Like Keyes (as I learned later) he was in charge of the Dover Patrol for a while (" we used to go out in the ships and stand up all night during the invasion threat—and come in next morning. Went on for about two months. We'd very little at that time—some shore guns had a hundred rounds—no more. The Army's faith in us was touching: ' You'll be able to give two or three hours' warning,' they said"). The Captain was Chief of Staff at Dover, too, during Dunkirk—supplied John Masefield with a good deal of the material for his book, *The Nine Days' Wonder*. A rating, himself four times a survivor, told me the Captain has a favourite remark when they're off on an adventure: " We'll blow them out of the water." This rating on one occasion was immersed for over 100 hours. " When they were getting me round, I screamed for about two hours. I couldn't stop and they couldn't stop me. I'd been numb to the wide, and the pain of the blood getting going again——"

The Captain's fear was that, following on our destroyers sinking an Italian cruiser and damaging several other ships yesterday, these other warships and convoy will not be where we hope to find them; which sounds a very reasonable fear. I talked with several other officers. One

said drily, " I am a Jonah. I had six months at the Admiralty—*Blitz* all the time. Then I went to Southampton—big *Blitz* first night I arrived." Another said: " In the middle of battle you'll hear a voice over the loudspeaker saying, ' Take down all washing from drying room.' That's a bos'n's mate. Battle or no battle, you hear that order." Up on deck a voice, faint in the distance, was saying, " Watch fall in and prepare for sea."

I asked how far off you can see a battleship; the reply was ten miles with the naked eye, twenty miles with glasses. The captain advised me to get a good night's sleep—" You'll be up all to-morrow night." The gunnery officer (he wears " G.O." on his steel helmet) struck me as young. He said: " Yes, men are specialising much younger while the war is on. This is the best job while there's a war on," he added. The first voice to greet me aboard was Canadian—rich brogue in the darkness. " Ah ! " somebody said. " He's from the backwoods." Most of the officers are R.N.R. or R.N.V.R.—one or two of the latter are solicitors, two of them, I'm told, rivals from the same town. But the key officers are R.N.—regulars. Another technical officer has been telling me how one of his jobs has been to " nurse " Dutch sailors, Poles, etc., coming from other navies, sometimes bringing partly-built ships with them. Thus he helped to complete building the Dutch destroyer, *Isaac Sweers*, which took part in the action a few days ago. The Dutch brought over two uncompleted submarines—those vessels had not been tested for leaks, but the Dutch didn't hesitate to dive them in order to elude the enemy—an action he regarded as truly heroic.

About 10 p.m. I was guided up to the bridge—a very dark night, not a light on deck; one fumbles about following the white cap of the man ahead, dodging torpedo tubes, bending under ropes: " When they've used the torpedoes they don't always at once fasten this piece of rail. Watch you don't walk overboard one day." The bridge seemed very high—a group of figures, dim, looking at us suspiciously, but not speaking. A glimpse of white wake from the ship ahead—a bar of red light where red glass covers part of a compass, a number of purple lights the size of sixpence. We were rushing along in the darkness over a sea where peril and death lurked—who knew, for instance, whether a U-boat was training her torpedoes on us—but quietly and efficiently the work went on: a quiet voice was saying, " Starboard ten—midships—two four six revolutions," and an echo-voice from another world down below repeated: " Two four six revolutions, sir." From the ship ahead of us or astern of us, once or twice, an infinitesimal gold light winked and then, as if ashamed of itself, stopped. Many questions came to my tongue, but they remained unspoken; I stood in the outer rim, feeling an intruder at this ritual; and at last I turned and stole away, down the empty decks, past the sea rushing by in white foam and black patches, looking most menacing and angry, and lugged open the heavy iron door, struggled

past the heavy canvas covering and got down to the cheerful wardroom, where men were drinking English beer from cans that resembled cans of metal polish. Now and then a voice would say something unintelligible over a loudspeaker, somebody to secure something or other, and a bos'n's thin shrill pipe would sound; the ritual was going on. I climbed a ladder and went to bed; they had fixed me up a camp bed in the Captain's cabin—the bunk was occupied by a Yugo-Slav Commander, aboard (like me) to see what he could see. A burly British Commander in sandals and blue sweater looked in to see if I were comfortable and to say we shouldn't go to dawn action stations unless it was necessary. He promised to rouse me if anything interesting happened in the night, and I turned in. I hesitated to wear pyjamas, didn't, found myself too hot in my underpants, and put on pyjamas and hoped for the best. Lights blazed (I thought some good reason existed for keeping them burning, but I might well have put them out). I was hot, and slept but poorly. But luckily for me the sea was calm. How much better off, however, was I than the Captain, who spent the night divided between bridge and sea cabin just beneath where he slept (if at all) in boots and with binoculars slung round him.

December 14th, 1941.

At 6.40 a.m. I heard the Captain's voice over the loudspeaker broadcasting to the ship's company, saying: "This is the Captain speaking. To-night offers us a fair chance of a scrap. Our intelligence tells us" (here he gave them details). He went on: "Our chance of being attacked by air is pretty good. I advise you to get as much rest as you can in order to be in good fettle for to-night; we shall probably be at action stations from midnight right through the following forenoon." Two ratings, listening with me, grinned and said: "That's that," and went on with their job. I thought how admirable it was to tell the sailors what's going on—several times to-day the Captain did it; I'm sure it makes everybody feel they are collaborators (as they are), and that it increases their sense of duty and self-esteem. And how different (and how much better) than the German method of making your men automatons!

I went up on to the bridge and found that the officer of the watch was a Lancashire man from Colne. The Captain showed to me the written orders (documents to be destroyed by fire when complied with). I saw what our aircraft are expected to do. Orders are Nelsonian in their brevity and simplicity. "To sink and to destroy"—cruisers will engage cruisers and destroyers, our destroyers will engage battleships.

I asked whether the bridge (which has no overhead cover) has any special protecting armour (for it's here the ship's directing brains are assembled). But it has not. Yet I'm told the enemy usually aim for the bridge (naturally enough). The Captain and I had a long talk; we

discussed the need for explaining this war to the men, the need for maintaining their determination and realisation of how grave it is, and what lies ahead should we be defeated. We talked too of the difficulty of operating in the Mediterranean without being spotted by the enemy. No matter when you leave Alexandria, you have long hours of sailing in daylight with enemy aircraft shadowing you; secrecy is impossbile. (Moreover, Alexandria must be full of enemy agents.) For many days we have patrolled the coast near Derna without making interceptions of convoys—that is, by destroyers; we may well have intercepted by submarines. We know the enemy are reduced, or have been, to sending in destroyers by night.

About 9.45 a.m. a boyish Sub-Lieutenant who is expert on the radio-detection apparatus took me into the special chambers where it operates. While we watched, an aircraft came within range and our guns went into action. The Sub-Lieutenant was quite delighted. " You couldn't have come at a better time," he kept saying. He added: " They usually shadow us eight miles behind, but come no nearer. Those are the Italians." At 10 a.m. an aircraft was within 9,000 yards and once more our guns cracked; not only our guns, either, for somebody put his head in and announced that " a lovely barrage " was being put up astern of us.

The firing grew more intense, so I went outside to see what was happening and was in time to see a column of water going up where a bomb had dropped about a mile off the port quarter. Now, one could hear the whistle of our shells as they went off towards the aircraft. The ships were flying a red flag—the air raid warning. Rain fell in silver drops for a few moments and then ceased. The scene was colourful, for our gun muzzles, shiny grey, were lifting and turning and thrusting this way and that like blind fingers endeavouring to touch somebody. At 10.35 it was announced that submarine contact had been made on the starboard side, but I wasn't clear how far this was off or exactly how definite the news was. I climbed back to the bridge. The Captain was now wearing a steel helmet and in charge of the ship, saying such orders as: " Starboard ten—twenty—thirty—ease to ten—midships—steer two nine seven." A rating using a long telescope said: " Admiral flying signal, sir," and then " Executive signal, sir. Carry out zigzag Number thirty-two." At 11.15 it was announced that the Captain would broadcast in one minute, and in one minute he did so saying: " We are now returning to defence stations. This is how it will be all the time. Next time action stations are ordered, do it as quickly as you can."

At 12.15 I was two-thirds way through my lunch when action stations were again sounded, but I persuaded the mess stewards to bring me my sweet and my coffee. Then they pushed couches on one side, pulled open a steel door in the wardroom side, put down a large mat and produced a long iron with a semicircle at the tip, the whole thing reminding you

of a mediæval torture iron from the Tower of London. " What's all this ? " I asked. " Oh," they said, " this is for raking in the used shell cases which come down the chute." I put on my lifebelt again, which sounds as though I were playing the bassoon when I blow it up—an object of delight to all who hear it—and went on the bridge in time to hear that aerial torpedoes had been dropped at us. Our guns were thundering at planes low on the horizon and our ship was making a great curve in the water. A good deal of chanting of orders and speaking of the loudspeaker from the radio-detector was going on, and suddenly the sky was speckled with black clouds where shells burst. Our six forrard guns were pointing accusingly to port. In a few quieter moments the Captain turned to me and showed me the latest signal—that the operation was postponed and we were to return to port. I must say that I felt disappointed, and he, I'm certain, was ten times more so. " You see," he said, " how we are shadowed all the time ? I went to Derna the other day. That was much the same." The air attacks had nothing to do with this decision—but our coming was known and maybe we knew now the enemy had stopped his convoys and sent his warships home full speed. The air attacks were continuing, and one wondered where our R.A.F. was—busy elsewhere, no doubt.

" What does all the washing say ? " inquired the captain, referring to the signals flying from the ship ahead. Immediately afterwards a two-engine bomber was seen above us.

" Diving, sir." The bomber turned on one wing and began to descend, through a maze of black shell bursts. Our own guns were pointing to the heavens and there was a moment or two when the Captain's face was silhouetted against the flash, so that his skin was turned a bright yellow, as though he had been painted with gold leaf—an extraordinary effect and one new to me. The dive of the aircraft had taken it to our left a little and now somebody remarked, always in a quiet voice, " Bombs dropping, sir "—and, indeed, they were. Four of them left the bomber in a cluster, each one as plain as my fountain pen—again, a new sight for me. Our ship turned and I lost sight of them. Varying reports said they were anything from a few feet to a hundred yards from our neighbouring ship *Galatea*. About this time also an object was sighted near the horizon that might have been a submarine's periscope—this was about 3.30 p.m. and we flew a signal to tell our other ships. I searched the seas with my glasses, but couldn't find anything—just as I often search the clouds for aircraft, but cannot find them when others can. I reckon I'm rather stupid at it. I have got this last half-hour's events rather confused. About 4 p.m. I had decided that a lull was falling on us and that I ought to get some tea. (The Captain had had a jug of tea and a cup sent to the bridge and invited me to take some, but I had declined—it was tea for one.) On my way down I climbed the searchlight platform to have a word with a cinephotographer, a newsreel man, and we sat

and talked. He didn't think he'd come to tea—he was afraid of missing something. Once before at this hour he had gone to tea and while he was walking the deck afterwards to get warm, a battleship, *Barham*, had been sunk a few hundred yards off and he had missed it—all over in a few minutes. I asked him if it looked terribly tragic, or was it too unreal? He said it didn't seem so tragic, but it was unnerving—it happened so quickly; there was a tremendous explosion. I left him on duty and went to tea, but had no sooner seated myself than bugles and pipes blew and everybody scurried off, a Commander saying to me: "That means go in a hurry." So I abandoned tea and climbed upstairs again. This time men were running along the deck—the first time since I had come aboard that men had done so; a few looked uncomfortable. It was when I had got to the bridge on this occasion that I saw the bombs dropping in the air. My steel helmet is two or three sizes too small—the only one I could get—and it is so uncomfortable that I only wear it when a crisis seems upon us.

After this bombing was over the Captain broadcast to the crew again, saying an attack had been pressed home and a ship nearly missed; he added that some destroyers were leaving us to go on a submarine hunt. Then he turned, asking, "Anything on the board?" meaning: Are any other aircraft reported?

I stood on the bridge till 5.5 p.m., by which time my legs and feet were weary. The sun was now departing, its last red gleams and glare akin to that of a blast-furnace door when it is briefly opened. I went to tea, though tea was long concluded; the steward, however, produced an enormous cup.

During the evening I talked with the Yugo-Slav naval Commander, whose wife and child are in Yugo-Slavia; knows from a recent letter (the first for many months) that they are alive, but is worried lest they don't get enough to eat; spoke of the need for showing Germany no mercy after the war. (Increasingly, this is a sentiment expressed by our own forces.) The evening went quietly; talks with a naval commander who wants his son to be a sailor; and I recalled a remark made to me that there'll be lots of jobs for our naval officers after the war, since we shall be called on to provide *Gauleiters* all over the place. About 11 p.m. I turned in—we were expected to make port at 1 a.m. I went to bed in peace; the adventure was over.

December 15th, 1941.

Soon after midnight I heard the Captain broadcast, but I couldn't distinguish what he said—something about reaching harbour, no doubt. I dozed again. But about 1.30 a.m. I heard a voice saying over the loud-speaker—"Special care must be taken not to allow the loss of *Galatea* to become known." I sat up, wondering if I had heard aright. This ship

was the one sailing immediately behind us. I got up and put on a dressing-gown and walked out and ran into a young Scots officer who had been on the bridge earlier with me. " Did I hear something about *Galatea* ? " I asked. " Yes," he said. " She's gone. Torpedoed. I was on the bridge—saw the light behind and heard the explosion, probably they got the magazines. We made a turn to the left. Then I saw a few pitiful flares on the sea—that was all. It was all over in two or three minutes. The destroyers are standing by. We continued on." I felt shocked; only by chance was I not on her. Two colleagues were aboard her. There was nothing to be done; no use dressing to talk about it. I went back to bed. About an hour later the Captain and the Engineer-Commander came next door and talked for a while. I didn't get up—felt I should be intruding.

This morning the Captain, who suggested I should breakfast in his room, showed me eye-witness accounts. He himself was on the bridge. " I thought somebody was using a searchlight and turned to see what it was. Then the explosions—but they were not loud. You could smell the fuel on the sea." The U-boat method now of attacking a convoy is to lie on the surface and fire from, say, several miles off and then turn, still on the surface, and make off hell for leather at about seventeen or eighteen knots. By the time confusion has subsided and the destroyer hunt begun, the U-boat is a long way off.

The eye-witness accounts did not carry us much further. One read: " The Captain asked, ' Is *Galatea* in station ? ' I had my binoculars on her. At 11.59 an explosion occured and a sheet of flame shot 150 feet into the air. *Galatea* immediately listed heavily to port and at the same time two further explosions occurred, the second of which seemed to break the ship in two. At 12.01 she was last seen sinking by the bows."

Another said: " At 2358 the Captain asked if *Galatea* had come round. I reported, ' Yes,' but before I could take my eye off *Galatea* she was apparently struck aft and the explosion lit up the ship. Two more explosions occurred, one external and one internal. When I last saw her, her stern was high in the air and she was going down by the bows."

W. F. Hartin of the *Daily Mail*, who was on *Jervis*, said he saw the flash forty miles away. I learned later that Massey Anderson of Reuter's was lost in her and that Larry Allen, an American colleague, was saved. The latter came ashore in bare feet, covered in oil. After he had recovered somewhat, he made two wisecracks; that he was thrown on the deck like a wet fish (a rope had to be slung round him to help him aboard after being in the water forty-five minutes) and that the enemy sent everything at him except the cavalry. He was sick several times from swallowing oil.

I met on board a young doctor wearing the D.S.C. who was on destroyers at the evacuation of Boulogne and Dunkirk, took some of the last troops to Calais, and is now out here; I read a diary he has kept

—very frank and truthful; first-rate stuff. We writers see nothing compared with the fighting men. He has been at sea with men who've had no sleep for five days. He himself took one man whose nerves suffered to his cabin and spoke to him in a very authoritative way and did him some good. Two others the Captain took to his own cabin, gave them tea and a cigarette, spoke to them of ideals and principles, told them how well he regarded their work; this treatment worked extremely well. The doctor described in his diary how those two men had become morose and sullen after seeing a man drowned. He believes in giving the men stimulants during periods of stress and little sleep—he made up one containing nux vomica. The men believed in it, and it did them good. He thinks short periods of sleep should be got whenever possible, even at action stations; and we need tablets containing stimulants, so that the men can easily take them. From May 10th to July 31st, 1940, the ship he was on lost 42 per cent. of the ship's company.

I see it reported that when a sloop was seriously damaged and it looked as though she must inevitably sink, Lord Louis Mountbatten signalled her commander—a R.N.R. Lieutenant—that he must abandon ship as he, Mountbatten, was going to torpedo and sink her. The sloop commander signalled back—" You put one —— torpedo into me and I'll put two —— torpedoes into you. I'm making port." And he did; and it's said Mountbatten recommended him for a distinction.

An amusingly malicious tale is told of a Colonel with a shore job who was usually tipsy by noon being sent for by the Admiral. This so disturbed the Colonel that he laced himself with whisky particularly well—and fell off the jetty into the harbour. He was fished out, dried out, and taken to the flagship. The Admiral, learning of the man's liquored condition, refused to see him. This further disturbed the gallant Colonel who again missed his footing, stepping back off the boat and fell once more into the harbour. He has since left the port.

The destroyer commanders go in for comfort and warmth when at sea. H. describes one on his last voyage wearing a leather golf jacket, flannel bags and old slippers.

December 16th, 1941.

To-day I went out to the submarine depot ship. When I was with the Captain, a young Commander came to report. " Can you make to-morrow? Are you full of fish? " inquired the Captain. Yes, he thought he could make to-morrow. " My internal salvoes are ready to fire." I found these technical or slang words very interesting. Fish are torpedoes. Later in the morning I went down below to the workshop, where torpedoes were having their head fitted; the head contains the explosive.

The torpedoes were coated in brown grease, glistening, shiny, beautiful pieces of mechanism, but horrible when you thought of their purpose. Each one has an engine in it; each one costs £2,000; and it happens sometimes that several are fired at a target. Six or eight torpedoes can be fired simultaneously in one salvo. The torpedo officer said: " We keep the pedigree of each torpedo more carefully than that of most children. Here's one that's twenty-six years old—it's been at Rosyth and also at Kowloon and has done two practice runs. But we've had torpedoes that have done 120 practice runs—altogether 300 to 400 miles." The best ranges, as one might expect, are below 1,000 yards.

During the past twelve months (up to December 6th) this flotilla has sunk merchant vessels totalling 116,000 tons, tankers totalling 40,400 tons and four U-boats and an escort vessel. In addition, hits on ships that have probably failed to reach harbour numbered fourteen on merchant ships and eight on tankers, the tonnage of those twenty-two ships reaching 97,200. One cruiser and one minelayer have been hit also. But these tonnages are far outstripped by our submarines working from elsewhere. One alone, that of Lieut.-Commander Wanklyn, who was given the V.C. a few days ago, has sunk over 140,000 tons of shipping.

I had a long talk with a genial, burly submarine Commander to whom I chanced to say that Commander Bickford, D.S.O., of the *Salmon* (he and his boat, alas ! have since been lost) found his sinking of a U-boat very trying—it upset him, this dog eating dog, in a way that sinking surface ships never did. This burly Commander said he had had a similar experience. " It made me unwell for forty-eight hours sinking my U-boat. I was diving when he surfaced about 1,500 yards off. I couldn't torpedo him and I surfaced and attacked by gunfire. Between seeing him, sinking him and diving and sitting down to breakfast was twenty minutes."

A commander who sinks a U-boat usually gets the D.S.O.—a practice that is a survival of the last war. I asked what age our submarine commanders are. The answer is usually below thirty-five, although that figure is somewhat elastic. Many are about thirty-two and some are younger.

The position of the Captain of this ship is trying, as you can imagine. He is a kind of father to them all. There comes a day when boats are due back and he waits with anxiety. At last one signals its arrival—another is late; soon she is very late. This was the situation when I walked the deck with him on the day I left his ship. He was worried and doing his best not to be. It is not a pleasant task to have to send another submarine into an area wherein the previous boat has been lost and we have no knowledge how or when or why. That is why when we on our side sink a U-boat we often preserve silence.

One wonders how they get the time over in a submarine. One young

officer about twenty-one grinned and said, " We go to sleep." They sleep very heavily just after they dive—they dive at dawn. They are tired and the atmosphere in the boat is pretty heavy, and they sleep like logs and wake up two or three hours later " gummy-eyed," as one of them said. After that they sleep further during the day, but the sleep is lighter. Of the games they play, ludo, strangely enough, is very popular. One lad said: " We get quite excited over it." Backgammon and a game new to me called " Chinese checkers " are favourites, too. Not much bridge is played; it's difficult to get a four. One officer said: " I read a lot till my eyes went wrong." Another said: " I read everything, from the Bible to purple passion."

These submarine commanders in the Mediterranean have done, and are doing, much to make our Libyan war a success. For it's largely a war, not only of tanks, but of petrol and supplies. Every Italian convoy that sails faces great hazard. Those ships hold German and Italian troops, tanks, petrol, food and stores of all kinds.

I stood the other morning on the submarine depot ship looking down at one of our craft which had just returned from its long Mediterranean patrol—that silent patrol during which it receives messages, but probably sends none whatever, during which the crew lose count of days, shave about once a week, probably never see daylight (for they come to the surface only at night) and during which some of them never even breathe fresh air. And now she was home, flying the Jolly Roger at her masthead and emblazoned on it her successes during the trip. Among other exploits she had sunk a 15,000-ton supply ship, she had attacked an Italian destroyer at night and put four shells into her amidships at 100 yards' range, and had almost certainly sunk—also at night—a U-boat—the fight being in that case at such close quarters that our Commander could look, at one point, down in the enemy conning tower as she dived. If Horatio Nelson were living to-day, he could hardly wish for anything more adventurous than this, or any better way of serving the British Commonwealth. What sort of man was our Commander? I had a long talk with him—he's a man of medium height, age thirty-two, rather slightly built, features so even as to be good-looking but unremarkable, grey-blue eyes, fair hair. He got his master's ticket in the Merchant Navy and his courtesy and his soft South-Country voice are the traditional R.N., where he's been for many years. He's an English type, a charming, disarming daredevil. He was quite honest in saying they were lucky to get back; he was candid about their disappointments: in his first attack he fired several torpedoes at a U-boat in a full gale with waves coming over his bridge—so stormy a night that all of the torpedoes missed—but he added to all this that in his view this war has made life worth living, that he much prefers war to peace, since war has heightened all the high lights, even though it's deepened the shadows. You

may, or may not, agree with him. He likes this war because he feels it has pushed a lot of triviality on one side and because it demands that men should be absolutely fit—an eye on look-out that isn't at its best is hopeless and useless. He likes his job and wouldn't change it. You and I, who probably look on his work as the toughest and most dangerous in the whole war, are surprised at that. But three or four other commanders I met said the same, and junior officers, too. A Commander wearing the D.S.O. and D.S.C., who made a good many patrols in the Skaggerak before he came here asserted that, provided you have an experienced commander, a good crew and a good boat, his is the safest job in the Navy. I don't suggest you should agree with him.

I asked the first Commander I spoke of, if he would tell me about his attack on the Italian destroyer. They're a submarine's deadliest enemy; it's usually the destroyer that hunts the submarine. He said: "It was a dark night with a heavy swell, not much wind. It was just before ten o'clock—he wasn't much more than a darker blob in the general darkness. We had three torpedoes ready and we fired them, but he saw the track of them and went full astern and, in consequence, they missed him. We were closing at half-speed and so close that I saw that we looked like getting in front of *his* torpedo tubes—so we, in turn, went full astern. He had begun to manœuvre, and he swung, so that now I had to drive full ahead. He was about 600 yards away at this time. We opened fire on him with our 4-inch gun and with our Bren and Lewis guns also. The night was overcast, with no stars, and all we could see was a dark silhouette. He handled his ship resolutely, and I next saw he was trying to ram us, but he put his helm over too late and we hit him with four shells at 100 yards—they all exploded within him, amidships. Our gun wouldn't bear any more in the position we were in. His attempt to ram us missed us by 50 yards astern, but it seemed to us at that moment to be no more than 3 feet—we could hear the babel of Italian voices and shouts as they went by. They never fired at us at all. I now came to the conclusion that it was time we dived, so the First Lieutenant opened everything. It wasn't an easy thing to dive in a hurry, because we had seven hands on the gun platform and seven on the bridge. We should normally take forty seconds to dive, but we did it in rather less than that; when I got inside the conning tower I was standing on somebody's back and could just close the lid with my knees up to my chin. I got the lid shut as water came over the top. At least four men had pieces of themselves through the lower hatch and it took us a couple of minutes to get ourselves sorted out. The destroyer then fired forty-four depth charges at us and smashed some of our lights—but nothing more than that."

I don't know whether you can imagine all that happening in pitch darkness and with a heavy sea running. The whole of that patrol was carried out day after day in a gale or half a gale; a submarine is a very

wet boat in conditions like those. When he was describing to me his fight with the U-boat, he said it reminded him of two knights jousting in the old days—he drove straight at the U-boat and the U-boat's nerve failed and he dived; and as he dived one of our shells hit his conning tower. They passed each other at 5 yards' distance.

The main secret of success in a submarine commander is being in the right place at the right time. In that quality, Lieut.-Commander Wanklyn is superb—he's a cool, calculating man, with a first-class brain, inclined to be studious. A man must be quick and decisive, he must be able to act on the instant, as Nelson did, but he must also be able to be patient—he may have to wait a week without striking a blow. A Commander in the last war did twenty-five patrols and saw nothing. All the commanders I met were youthful-looking men about thirty-two, three-fourths of them wearing the D.S.O. ribbon on their jackets—quiet, courteous men, but with the glint of a Drake in their eyes and possessed of the spirit that sent one submarine inshore to blow a train off the railway lines and that has given several of them the right to wear on their Jolly Roger flag a curved sword or a number of curved swords, each one representing an exploit of daring that must remain secret for the moment.

A genial giant of a man full of good humour and kindliness gave me a note of *his* own submarine's exploits. You wouldn't think him at first glance a redoubtable and ruthless warrior—but that is what he is. He saw two ships come to anchor and two minutes later, he sank them both. He dived into a harbour and acted as a beacon light during an attack. He hit an enemy cruiser at 7.45 a.m. and for the next five hours was depth-charged—they counted up to 200 depth charges and then gave up counting. He sailed beneath yachts at Ragusa—yachts peopled with girls and men smoking cigars. He saw a schooner and armed trawler lying inshore, came up alongside them, sank them both by gunfire, and then engaged a shore battery. There was the morning when he was preparing to attack two merchant ships escorted by two destroyers and by aircraft. Suddenly a shattering explosion occurred just behind him—a bomb had dropped. He was forced to dive and another bomb so upset the submarine's mechanism that it lit a signal which means fire certain torpedoes, and these torpedoes were accordingly fired, so that, in reality, the aircraft fired torpedoes at its own convoy. Of those two merchant ships, one passed his stern 30 yards off and the other 100 yards off—and the destroyers thundered overhead like an express train. On one occasion he had two wounded survivors on board for eight days—one with part of his leg shot away, and if you have been on a submarine—which makes you feel as though you were living inside a clock or a dynamo—with no doctor aboard, you get an idea what that means. Another officer told me he once had to read the burial service, and conditions were such that he was gasping between each sentence. Other submarine

records are a long catalogue of sinking ships, setting them ablaze, watching transports go down, but those successes are interspersed with arriving at Gibraltar with forty-three survivors and a mongrel dog, with getting tied up next day in a German sloop's wires to which explosives were attached. A commander told me how he heard bumping and found that a German mine had lodged on his forward planes and stayed there an hour. He wriggled it off and it bumped along the side and finally got caught in his propeller before he ultimately dislodged it. Quite recently one of our commanders torpedoed two enemy ships inside a harbour.

It's a stirring sight and a moving sight to witness the departure of one of these long, slender boats, with a stem whose nose resembles a prehistoric monster. On the bridge stands a group of young intrepid officers and forrard and aft are seamen in their jaunty little caps and grey sweaters. In an hour's time the officers will be in grey flannel bags and pullovers and to-night they'll breakfast at 8 p.m. and lunch at midnight, having begun to turn night into day. The long hazard will have started. None knows if he will return. Yet they go cheerfully, and, one would think to look at them, nonchalantly, dignified by the dangers they run and sustained by their adventures and their cause. What was Nelson's phrase: This band of brothers? Of no ships is it truer than our submarines. We had too few of them when the war began. But this Cinderella is proving a veritable princess of the service in rank and importance.

December 22nd, 1941.

I've been out of the desert now for three weeks and feel cut off and ignorant of what's afoot there. Last night, however, I met G. C., of the New Zealanders, who was with Freyburg at Sidi Rezegh. He said that there came a moment when Freyburg declared the moment had come to kill Germans—that killing Germans was more important than any war of position. And the New Zealanders set about it; there was far more bayonet fighting than ever took place in Crete; and at the finish the Germans were really broken—they would talk and were really and truly whacked. I asked if he thought the bayonet the best weapon for this job, and he laughed and said, " No—the best weapon is a tank—any sort of a fast vehicle carrying a heavy gun would do." What the fighting had proved was that artillery, once you have air supremacy, was still a magnificent weapon—almost supreme. He said drily: " In this war you *don't* want to see the whites of their eyes." He was describing one morning when twenty tanks were reported to be coming this way, and a dozen that and half a dozen yonder. He said that, for real drama, *Journey's End* wasn't in it. (Another officer remarked the other day that life on a destroyer in action would far outdo any *Journey's End*. Quite

clear to me nobody has ever heard of *Red Night* !) William Forrest has been telling me of the true remarks made when the Tobruk force encountered the first patrols from the outside world. The Tobruk men (Australians in this case, I think) shouted: " Who the hell are you ? " to which the others (New Zealanders, I believe) rejoined: " And who the bloody hell are *you* ? " Thus are historic moments greeted ! Richard Capel, just back from the desert, tells me pig hunts have been going on —men have been assembling at a fixed hour—one with a Tommy-gun, another with a repaired tank and off they've gone. Pig hunts have become German hunts and *vice versa*.

While I am dealing with journalists' tales, I must set down a cable received by a colleague the other day. He is a naval war correspondent, but went out to the Far East and was recently transferred back here (unwisely). Several naval correspondents have had narrow escapes from drowning—one, alas ! has been drowned. The cable read: " Smart ex-*Ark Royal*, Gallagher ex-*Repulse*, both good stories. What about it ? " —Smart and Gallagher, being two war correspondents who were flung into the sea from those ships, but escaped. This newspaper appeared to want to know why its own man couldn't have a narrow escape, too !

True tales far outdo others. A night or two ago I had supper with a former Mayor of a Norfolk town. He told me of a middle-aged fisherman, a regular character, who had done quite well out of his whelks and who came into a tidy sum of money—perhaps £15,000 or so. To everybody's surprise, he announced he was going to marry—his wife. It had always been assumed the highly-respected couple *were* married. Nothing would suit him now—having adopted a middle-class morality like Pygmalion's dustman-father—but to have a slap-up marriage ceremony in the town's main church; and his two grown-up daughters must be bridesmaids—and they were ! They had the wedding and they had a reception, too, to which some of the county folk came; for everybody liked them. Arnold Bennett could have done something with that story.

The ex-Mayor went on: " Those fishermen don't care tuppence about money, as a rule. They've fished and their forefathers have fished, for 400 years, and they're the biggest snobs going. A man put up for Parliament whose people had lived nearby only sixty years—and they wouldn't vote for him or have anything to do with him. I was in a pub one night when two aldermen came in and chatted away for a long while and then departed. An old fisherman who'd been standing near to them turned to me and said: ' I properly enjoyed meself to-night—never heard such a bit o' good lyin' for a long time. Now me, I can't get a chance to tell a lie—everybody know me—everybody know where I catches me whelks and how many there be of 'em and how much I get for 'em in market. I can't get a chance to tell a lie nohow, but them two fellas, they been

lyin' to one another all night like hell, and I really enjoyed myself—never heard a better bit o' lyin', not for a long, long time. No."

A. writes from London that the Lord's Day Observance Society object to folk registering on Sunday for fire-watching, and aptly remarks that the Godless Russians are dying on Sundays for the Lord's Day. Observance people ! On top of one Ministry enormous things like wire mattresses have been put with springs 20 feet high so that (presumably) bombs will bounce off. But where do they bounce to ? Canadians back from Spitzbergen said the worst thing was having to slaughter Eskimo dogs and horses and cattle before they came away.

December 23rd, 1941.

James Holburn of *The Times* was shot down in an aircraft a week or so ago. We had dinner together last night. I said it must have been terrifying. He said: " No. It's not so bad—once you realise you can do nothing about it and the end seems certain, you seem to stop worrying and become quite calm. I had another feeling, though, and that was that I was a damn' fool to let myself get into this mess in which I could do nothing." This aircraft was this side Mussolini's wire near Maddalena and not far from Battle H.Q. He had seen two or three Messerschmitts, lost sight of them—his aircraft was about 1,000 feet up—and then suddenly, a burst of bullets came into the fuselage. The men opposite him flung themselves on the floor, the aircraft lurched and Holburn himself was thrown on top of them. It was fortunate he was, because the next burst came through the aircraft where his head had been. He saw a patch of blood on his trousers and his head was hurt. He was waiting for the next burst of bullets, quite certain this was the finish of everything, but the burst didn't come, and suddenly he felt the plane flatten out and thought: " We might get out of this yet." The wheels touched ground, crumpled up, and they were down on rough sand. He had some particles of metal in his eyes, particles which have since been extracted; he said they didn't hurt very much—merely like having a fly in your eye—and now he's wearing dark glasses.

I was discussing this business with William Forrest. Willie said: " Yes, that seems to be quite right about not being afraid at the finish. In Spain I was in a car which turned four or five somersaults. I saw our chauffeur was not going to get round the bend, and in that moment I was frightened. But once we went over the bank and the car was turning over, I thought: ' Well, I've often expected to be killed and now I am *being* killed,' and I was intensely curious to see how it happened and how soon and all about it. Actually, I wasn't hurt, though two of my companions were badly injured." Holburn remarked on that, too—his intense curiosity to see what would happen. I said: " Well, that's our job—

maybe we are more curious than other folk." But when danger is afoot, I usually feel it is not quite real and that I am an onlooker and outside of it.

Another fine letter from A., full of news of England. " There is no one now looking for work. Every day one finds a ticket collector or a shop assistant that one has known for years has suddenly vanished and been replaced by someone older, or that there is a woman in place of a man. And I notice such a change in the faces of the women. Watching them in buses or trains, they all have a look of purpose on their faces. Shall we ever go back to keeping spoilt, idle women ? But one dreads to think of the tragedies there'll be when all these women are turned out again at the end of the war. But I'm sure that the good will be, on the whole, lasting. How much better wives and mothers these young girls will make who have been through the discipline of the Services.

" There was a lecture in our church last week on the glories of Russia and the marvels of Communism. What next ! Those who could not be reasonable at all over Communism are just those who are falling over themselves now to say how marvellous everything in Russia is. There are, I believe, no depths of idiocy to which human nature cannot descend. Someone has written solemnly to the *Telegraph* to the effect that German is not a language that can be spoken by civilised people. . . . A friend was one of those taken on a raider and landed on a desert island. She told the reporter they had been treated with consideration on the raider. He replied, 'Oh, you mustn't say that. I want any cruelties that you can tell me about.' That complete disregard for truth for propaganda purposes is one of the things that depresses me more than anything else. . . . I always remember Lothian saying the age of lying began in 1914 and has continued ever since. I have just read Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. It describes in brutal detail the horror that war brings, but I think it is good, because it prepares one's mind to accept the same sorts of things if they should ever come near. I feel now that I can bear with equanimity horrors that I could not even have borne to think of two years ago. If wars are to be waged at all, I suppose this is a necessary and merciful state of mind."

This reference to war horrors reminds me that Richard Capel and his companions were the other day confronted with the task—or, at least, they took it on themselves to do it—of taking out of a broken tank the poor body of one of our gunners who was dead and badly hurt about the legs. It was an awful task, lifting him out through the top and then burying him, for they had no tools and had to dig a grave as best they could, scraping away the sand and stones with empty jam tins. Capel said that, judging by this old field of battle, a tank battle must be the most awful sort of fighting one can—or cannot—imagine. I often think I have not written enough about the horrors of this war, but the truth is

I have mostly been spared the sight of them so far, and if I described them in my despatches they would either be stifled by the Censor or omitted by my newspapers. But I could set them down here, maybe.

I found on returning to Cairo that the whole of my message to the *Sunday Times* of a date ten days ago was stopped by " higher authority." First, the R.A.F. took out one piece. Then the Army began to consider it; I had said we are the gallantest of people, but the most improvident, and so on. Finally, it was stopped. Nobody in England could have stopped it had I been writing there. Randolph Churchill spoke to me about it, saying he was sorry for the bad luck I'd had with it. I gathered he himself favoured letting it go; his views on this censorship business are near to my own. As a result, I wrote him the following letter, which William Forrest approved of, and signed with me:

" DEAR CHURCHILL,—Perhaps it will be of some small use in the discussions you are about to have at home with the military authorities, to have a note of our point of view as war correspondents.

" 1. A correspondent has a duty, not only to the armed forces, but to the British Commonwealth as a whole. His despatches must command the respect both of the troops and of people at home; if they do not, he is useless. From time to time he is appealed to by both officers and men to draw attention to a grievance—it may be the shortcomings of the Naafi, or an anomaly in pay or allowances, or even some shortage of equipment. To ignore all such complaints, if he thinks them just, is to fail in his duty; for if he does not speak out, who will? He is, to some degree, a safety valve for the troops.

" 2. On the general subject of criticism, if there is justification for the House of Commons in wartime, there is justification for a war correspondent being allowed to be critical. If all his criticisms are stifled and if, at a later date, statements in the House of Commons or elsewhere make plain what the correspondents failed to reveal, the public naturally say: 'But what were the war correspondents doing? Why didn't they tell us about that? We might have put it right in time.' If correspondents make a practice of enlarging on what is favourable and suppressing all that is unfavourable, their craft and their work is brought into contempt. Moreover, to stifle their criticisms discriminates unjustly and unwisely between them and writers at home who are free—although sometimes uninformed—to speak their minds. No correspondent wants to be critical all the time or, indeed, critical at all, except in so far as he thinks his criticisms will help our war effort.

" 3. It is quite true that a certain amount of criticism gets through. One has the impression that it does so more by accident than design on the Censor's part, and that the higher military authorities always resent it, and would invariably suppress it if they could. But the Censor's

function is not to close every mouth except those singing praises; it is to preserve military security and to prevent the publication of facts that would help the enemy—his province, if it exists at all beyond that, is extremely small. He also, if we may be so bold, should have his eye on our nation as a whole and our cause as a whole. He might well remember the occasion when Northcliffe exposed the shell shortage and when the *Daily Mail* was burnt on the Stock Exchange. Does anybody doubt now that Northcliffe was doing his country a great service? And would any military censor have passed what Northcliffe wrote? That is why we say the correspondent who takes his work seriously must, on occasion, look beyond the armed forces or the reputation of a particular individual to the greater cause. The correspondent is attached to the Army, but he is not a part of it; he is an observer and recorder; he is to some degree at all events a safeguard and a watchdog. There might be an occasion when he considered that throwing light on some shortcoming or need for expediting provision of certain equipment would far outweigh any temporary satisfaction afforded the enemy by knowledge of our shortage. The rejoinder may be made: 'Then let the correspondent put forward his view privately and not publicly.' Correspondents from time to time do so, but sometimes the weight of public opinion is needed to supply driving power.

"4. A correspondent who consistently writes as though perfection reigns when it does not runs the danger, not only of not doing a service to our cause, but of unwittingly assisting the enemy by adding to complacency and putting a brake on efforts at improving and speeding up.

"5. Nobody likes criticism, but without it our democratic system will not work. Our armed forces are part of our democratic system."

December 24th, 1941.

Information from men who have just returned from Russia is interesting and amounts to this: The Russians would not allow them near their munitions works—the Russians trust nobody. Nor would they permit them at the Front. Behind the Russian armies is another army—but of policemen—to prevent anybody going through.

Over 50 per cent. of the German withdrawal is, so to speak, voluntary to permit regrouping and so forth. But without question the Germans have for this winter lost the Russian war, and know it and accept it. The Russians, however, are short of all material except aircraft and are not in a position to overrun Germany even if they could, and it is extremely unlikely that they could. Organisation behind the Russian lines is decidedly poor. The man-power in Russia is enormous—given equipment, their armies are illimitable or almost so. Nor is the morale of

the people anything to be considered—if Stalin laughs, they laugh; if he frowns, they frown. All those who were potential opponents of Stalin are in concentration camps—several millions of them. The regard for human life is small: the wounded are treated, but beyond that nobody takes much notice of them—not in the sense that we do. They are wounded and out of the fight and as such are not important. The Russians are short of clothing, as are the Germans, but, being used to the winter they suffer less.

Robin Hankey of the Embassy looked in to see my Polish friends last night—about thirty-six, partly bald, sharp-featured, liked by everybody. Willie Forrest was telling us how he himself (the only correspondent who speaks any Polish) was arrested in Tobruk by three Polish soldiers because Forrest and his companions didn't know the password. Willie went so far as to recite to them a piece of Polish verse which usually brings tears to the Pole's eyes, but all they answered was " Password, pleese ! " He had another good story. On his way up to Tobruk in a destroyer, standing on the bridge with General Sikorsky, an air raid was developing. Just then a neighbouring destroyer winked a message and they were all agog to see what it was. Had she spotted a submarine or something ? The signaller read out the message: " Salt-caked smoke stacks—is it Kipling or Masefield ? "

Hankey asked during our talk : " What has become of the *Luftwaffe* ? The Russians have mastery in the air, we have it out here, and we have it at home and over northern France." It's said there's a great concentration of *Luftwaffe* in Italy, but no sign of them as yet. He regards, as do most of us, Hitler's taking over command of the Army from von Brauchitsch as a good sign for us, but one leading to ructions on Hitler's part—he'll do something desperate, no doubt.

A friend who was in Tobruk described to me how our forces there established a corridor three miles wide and stretching to within three miles of Sidi Rezegh. Within this corridor it was very hot; fighting and shelling were always heavy. Yet our ambulances went up there day after day, and occasionally received direct hits or shots so close as to destroy them. My friend spent a morning in a forward dressing station. A stretcher bearer came in, shell-shocked. His hands trembled rather violently. Yet he kept saying, " I must go back there—they need me there." He spent a morning with our R.H. artillery too. He found two hours long enough for him—the counter-battery work was heavy—yet these artillery officers were working out their calculations with the utmost coolness, and 20 yards off a driver was making a dixie of tea !

Holburn, who was injured in the eyes when shot down in an aircraft, paid tribute to the gentleness of our medical orderlies in attending to our wounded; said they were really fine. He met an officer who escorted

the German General von Ravenstein from Mersa Matruh to Alexandria. The General had been torpedoed on our merchant ship coming from Tobruk. He said to the officer in charge of him as he climbed into the aircraft: " Your Colonel who looked after me on the ship lost his life. I hope you'll be more fortunate."

January 1st, 1492.

I'm told by one who claims to have seen the necessary evidence that German civilian morale has sunk to a remarkable degree since last April. He added that German soldiers' morale in the desert was low before fighting began, rose with the offensive and is still good.

I am back in Cairo, having spent the past four or five days with my friends in the heavy bomber group. The young pilot who flew me to Crete and his rear-gunner (turned forty) are still safe, thank heaven. They've done eleven more raids since I was with them. Describing one of his trips, the pilot said: " I put my wheels and all my flaps down and drifted in as quietly as I could, dropped my bombs and stole out again. Jesus! I was glad to get away with it. We all did, though. Another night we bombed an oil dump—came down to 500 feet. No opposition at all. Every bomb chucked us up in the air. Old L. let off 2,000 rounds into tents. I'm off operations now; I'm teaching chaps to fly at night; I have babies every time I go up." He's done fifty-odd raids; his rear-gunner has done sixty-five, and both are wearing the D.F.C., finely earned.

Benghazi, being ours, is not bombed by us any more. These lads almost feel out-of-work. They have written a song called "Bard of Benghazi " to the tune " Clementine." Part if it goes thus:

Down the Flights each bl—— morning,
Sitting waiting for a clue,
Same old notice on the Flight board:
Maximum effort—guess where to.

Chorus

Censored squadron, censored squadron,
Tho' we say it with a sigh,
We must do that bl—— mail run
Every night until we die.

Take off from the Western Desert,
Fuka sixty or O-nine,
Same old Wimpey, same old air crew,
Same old target, same old time.

Have you lost us, navigator?
  Come up here and have a look,
Someone's shot our starboard wing off,
  We're all right, then, that's Tobruk!

Fifteen Wimpeys on the target,
  Two force-landed in the drink,
Another couple crashed on landing
  Bl—— Hell, it makes you think.

Streator tell us from his photos
  That we seldom reach B.G.,
Sees no bomb holes in the roof tops,
  Only craters in the sea.

So we sit upon our arses,
  Hang our heads in deep disgrace,
Perhaps we've never really been there;
  Must have been some other place.

Oh, to be in Piccadilly,
  Selling matches by the score,
Then we shouldn't have to do
  The bl—— mail run any more.

They might almost now sing:

Where do we go to-night, boys?
  Where would you like to be?
The Wimpeys all are waiting
  And the moon is sailing free,
Oh, you'd better take your Wimpeys, boys
  And sail 'em on the sea,
For to-night we're out of work, boys,
  B.G. is N.B.G.

The following, I'm assured, is a true tale. The 11th Hussars acted as escort for General Haining in Palestine. Haining likes travelling fast and was pleased with the fashion in which his escort kept up. He asked a sergeant-major of Hussars how they managed it. The sergeant-major answered: "Well, sir, the reason is this—that bonnet has a padlock on and three weeks ago I lost the —— key."

I asked a flying officer who's been to Benghazi twenty-five times if the pilots think or talk much of the England they want after the war. He

said: " No. It's the chaps who have nothing to worry about—the doctors, equipment officers and so on who have nothing to worry about in the shape of safety, who'll have the say after the war. The pilots are too busy to think about it."

I looked over a Flying Fortress—the first I've seen. Yet this giant aircraft was roughly in its present shape and development in 1935. We never, as a nation, realised it or took account of it. In thinking of the effect of air power on warships, we seem to have thought of infinitely smaller aircraft with small bombs and few of them. Hence the sinking of *Repulse* and *Prince of Wales* two or three weeks ago (at a cost of seven aircraft).

On the Fortress the gunner amidships has his head exposed to elements —this at 35,000 ft. He wears an electrically heated suit and oxygen apparatus. If either fails, he dies. If oxygen fails, nitrogen bubbles in his blood and the agony is excruciating. To fight with these hazards added to those normally present in air battles is a job for supermen or gods. This aircraft needs two pilots to fly it—sitting side by side. One may be a sergeant, the other an officer. The sergeant could be in charge.

January 3rd, 1942.

To-day I came to Alexandria and was lucky enough to run into Brigadier W., who commanded our tanks in Tobruk—mostly " I " tanks (infantry tanks) but some cruisers also. He was twice slightly wounded. Once his tank ran on a surface mine (a coffee-pot lid mine, I think he called them) with each track. At that moment, too, a shell hit the tank and the whole lot vanished into a cloud of dust and smoke. His Staff officer, following in the tank behind, immediately 'phoned back something like this: " Donkety-donk calling. Donkety-donk calling. Brig's gone." Meanwhile W. had climbed out of his tank, hardly knowing what was happening and, thinking it was on fire, ran to the Staff officer's car. " He didn't see me. I was shouting, ' Let me in. Damn it, let me in '—there was a lot of machine-gun fire about—but instead of that he was busy calling-up the people further back saying, ' Donkety-donk calling. Donkety-donk calling. I was wrong. Brig's all right ! ' "

I think Brigadier W. really enjoys fighting—he already wears the D.S.O. and M.C. with bar, and he hasn't yet been rewarded for his work in Tobruk. Like most brave men, he is generous to bravery in others. He told me of one of his second-lieutenants who, sitting in his " I " tank, saw an armoured car hit some distance ahead and the officer get out of it to repair it and get hit. " This lad thought, ' I must do something about this,' and he trundled forward, halted near the armoured car—by this time Jerry was throwing everything he had at it—got the wounded officer, put him in his armoured car, went to his tank, got a tow rope,

hitched it to his tank and was getting ready to go when the shelling got worse, hit the armoured car and broke the tow rope. At this moment he was hit in the leg. He then climbed out of his tank—his tank bore forty hits by shells when it was all over—went over to the armoured car, climbed on it, opened the lid, got the wounded officer out, carried him over to his tank, stood on the back holding the wounded chap and while doing this was hit a second time, this time in the arm. But he held on, and his tank drove out of range with the two of them on the back." This young officer was Captain P. J. Gardner. He has since been awarded the Victoria Cross. This officer was always in the thick of it, coming up to W. and asking: " Any targets ? Any targets ? "

I asked him how he thought the enemy fought. He said some of the Italians fought well, but he thought but little of the Germans. One position we took still held 500 unwounded Germans; we took, in addition, thirty-two anti-tank guns and a host of machine-guns. On one occasion he received an order that such and such a position must be taken. He had at that moment only eleven tanks that were mobile. He gave orders that, on the signal, guns would open fire as hard as shells could be rammed in, and that, putting accelerators right down, they would go forward like hell in one small mass. It was dark at the time. This they did and the Germans—and they had at least forty tanks of various sorts in this position—broke and went, some this way, some that. It was a case of bluff succeeding, but what nerve inspired the bluff ! The Northumberland Fusiliers tried the tactic of driving up in their lorries hidden by the dust-storm created by the tanks, and it succeeded.

There were moments, said W., when he came under shell-fire more intense than anything he knew in the last war. He had been told a certain ridge was in our hands—but it wasn't; he was deluged with shells, some of them 200-mm. and a rain of solid 75s, to such a degree that he wondered, he says, if he were seeing things.

I asked him if we have learnt anything from the fighting. He said not much, except that tanks must be kept under the command of tank commanders. " Using tanks in penny numbers, three here and three there, is hopeless. They must fight together."

January 6th, 1942.

There's little of the central and eastern Mediterranean through daylight hours that hasn't keen young eyes searching its waters. I've been visiting the squadrons whose task this is. They've sunk two submarines in the past fortnight. While I was there, they were shadowing an Italian battleship with two cruisers and eight destroyers at one spot and two cruisers and three destroyers elsewhere. To pick up the enemy fleet is their delight; a rare one. The Wing-Commander said: " I believe the actual date of our offensive was affected by our sightings." Chatting

with the air crews, I learnt that on November 8th began the period showing a great increase in sightings of enemy aircraft on passage between Crete and Libya, mostly JU.52s and JU.88s, evidently carrying stores. This use of gliders to North Africa hasn't, I think, been previously noted.

Our Blenheims not only observe and record—occasionally they fight. They call submarines " our natural enemy," and have sunk at least four. They have attacked destroyers also. Our men have plenty of humour. One pilot stated that an officer of the armoured division arrived; said he was advanced party sent to prepare a camp which had been located in the middle of our aerodrome. It was pointed out that putting a camp there might cause some confusion. He explained that, according to his senior officers, there was no airfield there. Another pilot gave a picture of one of many similar encounters: " On seeing our aircraft, the submarine crash-dived and was already submerged when aircraft passed over the spot. A salvo of bombs was dropped and hit the water 20 feet short of the spot where submergence occurred. The aircraft climbed, turned to port and both pilot and gunner saw a large column of water shoot into the air. The gunner claimed he saw a flash too. In another fight an Italian gunner turned his gun on our aircraft, but a salvo of bombs blew him into the water."

In our pilots' view, Italian submarines surface during the day oftener than German U-boats, the inference being that the Italians don't like being under the sea. But their action might also be taken the other way —a sign of courage—since submarines must come to the surface, or near it, to see what's going on.

Of the attack on the destroyers, it was said, " We sighted two destroyers, two-funnelled with red foredecks and a frame at the top of their short mast. Bombed in shallow dive; three fell 20 yards from the port side. Destroyers opened fire with medium A.A. guns, using red, green and white tracer. Brown smoke was seen coming from one destroyer abaft the funnel which definitely was not a smoke screen."

This Mediterranean reconnaissance is an admirable example of the fine work our men do which goes unsung. Our men say: " We just go stooging around. Some of us attacked a Greek harbour, but that was glamour stuff." I asked how they judge dimensions of ships seen and they replied: " We ask ourselves how many cricket pitches we could put along the deck." It takes some time to train eyes to see what's on the water, especially when it's no more than a periscope. They assert they can see better on cloudy days, because they can then focus eyes on clouds before turning them on the water. Photographs of submarines taken from the air show how little there is for the airmen to see—no more than a thin white line of foam. I saw a photograph which was taken of our British warships when I was out with them—the ships appear as infinitesimal white pencils in the water. Eyes improve over a certain

period at picking up objects, but they can also grow tired. The keenest vision is needed, for submarines vanish below in thirty seconds. If our American allies had brought their sea reconnaissance to our pitch, the Japanese would hardly have succeeded so well. Indeed, our own experts on this work could now design an aircraft better suited to the job than the one we use.

In day-to-day arduous, responsible work, this job would be difficult to beat. On only two days in the past six months have they not operated. Throughout all hours of daylight, their sorties are out over the sea in land machines. You or I might be inclined to hold our breath looking down on those tumbling waters. Occasionally an aircraft does not return, and none in our ranks knows her fate. But, happily, it's about a hundred to one on any individual patrol returning safely; anyhow, the work goes on. Even on days of sandstorm, they manage to get up into the air and go off to work.

Among the so far unrecorded strange tales of this war is this: A tanker of ours, going to Tobruk, was routed wide of the normal course and, in addition, got still further off the normal track in bad weather. Being in that position, she was mistaken by the enemy for one of their own vessels, whereupon a M.E.110 began to escort her, and did so for five or six hours. When our own reconnaissance craft went to investigate, the German aircraft jealously beat it off, guarding our ship like a watchdog. This happened to two of our aircraft at different times, so that they, also, not unnaturally concluded the tanker was Italian. They reported the business to our light bombers, who now sent several Marylands to sink her. A Maryland dived down on her and was very close when the pilot saw the small white ensign at the stern, and turned away. He turned enough to avoid hitting her, but his bombs fell close enough to break all the crockery in the ship (as the tanker reported when she got to Tobruk). About this same time an enemy tanker left Bardia for Crete, but vanished utterly, and it's thought possible that she was sunk by JU.88s, who, having decided our tanker was theirs, proceeded logically to argue that theirs was our own. But this latter point is uncertain.

These are typical entries from the squadron diary:

Amid torrent of back-chat, they claimed to have sunk a submarine and were frankly disbelieved by Operations and Intelligence until, etc. They had seen it doing a speed of ten knots, and made a dive attack, passing over the port quarter at a height of 100 feet. A bomb was dropped 10 feet astern; this manœuvre was repeated as the submarine dived. A great mass of water rose just aft of the conning tower. This also was repeated. When the disturbance in the water had subsided, bubbles were observed rising to the surface, but not moving in any direction. The interval between dropping the first bomb and the submarine's final disappearance was eight or nine minutes, and it's

thought she was damaged immediately and prevented from crash diving.

A Sunderland was seen coloured dark green and escorted by one ME.109, noticeable for desert camouflage. (The Sunderland was being flown by the enemy.) Two ME.110s were soon afterwards sighted. One proceeded to carry out three attacks on the quarter. It had the speed to make rings round our Blenheim and carried out a beam attack from the starboard side. Our pilot turned his aircraft to meet this attack at the moment the enemy opened fire. The ME.110 passed behind our aircraft. These manœuvres were repeated by both sides and the Blenheim was given the chance of a long deflection shot. The ME.110 then rather foolishly turned in front of our aircraft, offering another full deflection shot. After this burst, the ME.110 rear-gunner was silenced, and it was last seen going low over the water from 400 to 10 feet, with smoke pouring from the starboard engine. Our aircraft was hit through the forward compartment, bomb-racks and wings. (As the navigator sat at his chart, a bullet pierced each bottom-right and left corners of his chart without touching him.)

A later message from the S.A.S.O.: "Have heard of pink snipe, but never green Sunderlands. Beer is best."

In an attempt to get Group on the Tie-line, an interesting conversation was heard with a person attempting to date a girl for that night. Thereafter the Tie-line went haywire. . . .

Observed one red mine with horns.

Sighted three JU.52s towing gliders. Gliders were painted pale-blue and were about half the size of JU.52s.

Sighted an orange dinghy with crew of four, who waved their yellow paddles. Our aircraft dropped water and tinned food 30 yards from the dinghy.

On sighting aircraft, submarine submerged and showed no identification signals. Submarine was dark-blue in colour and had a gun built in conning tower.

Sighted an enemy flying boat DO.24 at 1,000 feet. In order to identify the aircraft, the Blenheim climbed up underneath and fired 100 rounds with the front gun, opening fire at 300 yards and breaking off at 100 yards. Fire was returned—explosive bullets were used by enemy.

Three JU.52s seen at 100 feet—one thought to be towing a glider, red in colour and half a mile behind.

A foreigner came on phone asking what station this was. Information refused.

January 7th, 1942.

To-day we set off from Alexandria for the desert—among us Forrest, James Holburn of *The Times*, Richard Capel on the *Daily Telegraph*, and Grover of A.P. Forrest, Capel and I drove together. Capel won the Military Medal as a stretcher-bearer in the last war. We talked of many things, among them lice. " Do you realise," Capel said, " that nobody is lousy in this war ? " I had overlooked it. Some men in Tobruk had boots on for seventeen days, but no lice appeared. I asked Capel why he became a stretcher-bearer, and how he won the M.M. He said he got the job more by luck than judgment—he went to join up, and they happened to be wanting men for the field ambulance. As for the medal—" The Germans attacked and collared our front line. We spent three days trying to take it back—all very exposed. We worked till the last gasp and since I was a corporal and the other chaps were not, I suppose that's the reason I got the M.M." He was in High Wood on the Somme in the autumn of 1916 (I had been there in July.) At that time (autumn) they sometimes had to use nine men to one stretcher to get it out—a job lasting eight hours.

It emerged during our talk that among the English regiments in Tobruk during the recent offensive were the York and Lancs., the Essex, the Black Watch, the Leicesters and the Northumberland Fusiliers.

I was reminded to-day of a quip J. M. N. Jeffries once made—we were talking to a group of naval folk, among whom was an officer's wife who had written a book. She rather bored us talking of her book. She said she wanted an arresting title for it—it must really be arresting. Jeffries said, with his dry smile, " Why not call it Scotland Yard ? "

During the recent attack the South Africans made on Bardia, a Brigadier scattered a huge number of petrol tins over the front, fashioning them into a design. When the General saw them, he wanted to know what the devil they were for ? The Brigadier replied he didn't know, but he reckoned they would puzzle the enemy. They did—the enemy spent a lot of time and ammunition shelling them.

January 8th, 1942.

We got no further than the old camp at Maarten Buggush last night; they've had floods since I was last there, and the mess and bar, built in sandbags with tent coverage, now resembles a breastwork redoubt; one day it was 2 or 3 feet deep in water. Three of us put our camp beds up in the tent where we ate, and had a good night's sleep. Difficult to believe, with this shrewish wind blowing, and tales of floods, that this is the spot

whereon we sweltered a few months ago. One passes Arabs in bare feet tramping the stony desert in the icy winds. Their feet look blue and black with cold; how much is dirt is hard to say.

January 9th, 1942.

Last night we slept in the open at Buq Buq. Dark falls at six, no lights are possible, so we sat on our beds arranged between two cars and played a spelling game—somebody begins with a letter and the next man adds a further letter, and so it proceeds. What you have to do is to prevent the word concluding at you—otherwise you are " out." We got a lot of fun out of it. Bed was comfortable enough till the early hours, when, as Grover said, a cold spot develops in the middle of your back and slowly expands. I took nothing off except tunic, boots and cap. I had two blankets, two sleeping bags, two mufflers (one round my head) and a greatcoat and mackintosh. What you need is a windbreak. My small tent is being used by somebody in the Benghazi region. The devil of sleeping out is that the wind veers in the night—you fix your bed in the lee of the car, but halfway through the darkness, the wind changes and blows right on to you. It often freezes these nights. It's a relief when daylight comes and you can rise, even though you do not shine. Shaving is the devil, too. Cold water and a bitter wind, and you'd think the beard were growing in concrete.

To-day we arrived near Sollum; we had some minor sandstorms on the way. From time to time I would say, chuckling: " Do you call *this* a sandstorm, Capel? "—this when we couldn't see more than 20 yards.

" Oh, no, this is nothing."

He and Forrest then were off at a gallop: " Do you remember when poor old Denny had to be placed underneath the car to try and give him a little shelter—we thought he was going to die, to choke? "

" Well," I said, " tell me when we get a real sandstorm, will you? I'd like to see one. By the way, who wrote the song 'Till the sands of the desert grow cold'? "

We called on Major-General de Villiers—short, thick-set, good-looking, iron-grey hair, Huguenot family; South Africa's Commissioner of Police and commanding a division which has in it a regiment composed of South African policemen. Fifty per cent. of them (he said) are marksmen and a further 48 per cent. first-class shots. He told us what he plans to do, showed it to us on the map, and next on a plaster-cast in relief of the battle area which he's had made. (The Russian General Suvorov, contemporary with Nelson, did the same with the fortress of Ismail.) The first job is to take Sollum (we've occupied the Barracks for a couple of months), next a Point 207 held by about 1,500 enemy and, finally, Halfaya (or Hellfire) which has, he thinks, a garrison of some

6,000, 5,000 of whom are German. (It turned out, later, that the numbers were about equally divided.) Halfaya's guns are estimated at 150, of all calibres up to 150 mm., a lot of them concreted in. But whether we shall assault Halfaya is doubtful. De Villiers's view is that it would be very costly, and that the garrison cannot hold out more than a few more weeks. I asked whether the question of supplies to Benghazi made it imperative we should take Halfaya and thus open up the coastal road (which would probably save a day's journey). He didn't think so—the supplies problem had been eased a lot lately.

The Germans have been dropping supplies by air—some of it our own Libby's bully beef captured in Crete. The procedure is that their aircraft drops a flare, whereupon the troops on the ground shoot up another flare to indicate where they are. When this happens, our Blenheims have been bombing them.

The Free French have brought women to the desert in their C.C.Ss.—an innovation.

De Villiers said the " bombing " we have heard is the registering of our 60-pounders. We've been giving the enemy a very hard time on Point 207—they're steadily gunned by us (one deserter said they had suffered 200 to 300 casualties recently) and are short of food. The Italians are down to half of one small tin of meat a day, a ¼-litre of water, and half of a large biscuit which has beef among its constituents. We've spotted many enemy guns by flash—at this spotting the British, said de Villiers, are very good. Speaking of Bardia, he said there were as many Germans in the garrison as there were South Africans attacking. Only three of our tank officers were killed—which was a miracle. The garrison in Bardia asked the enemy garrison in Halfaya to counter-attack to relieve our pressure. Halfaya replied: " Can't—our guns are dug in concrete." In de Villiers's view, we are not being tough enough with the enemy. An interesting technical point emerged—that in our attack on Bardia we used 500 miles of telephone cable.

January 10th, 1942.

For three hours yesterday afternoon we sat in our cars in the desert not far from the General's tent, unable to move. This, Capel conceded, was now really a sandstorm. The wind howled, sand blew through all the crevices till I resembled a village baker, and the scene outside got steadily more like a scene in an Arctic film—blowing sand, battered tents, the few moving figures of men bent in the gale, heads down. Our Lancashire truck-driver sat up in his cab, having rigged up an old coat to guard him a trifle, immovable, dogged, more and more akin to a figure built of sand.

The General's A.D.C., with great kindness, wandered along to see how we were and offered to guide us on to the road for Bardia; at

Bardia, he said, we might find a ruined house with a roof on. This sounded very acceptable, for Grover, especially, was spending uncomfortable nights, having no bed and sleeping in a shallow hole scooped in the sand. Moreover, our conducting officer has gone to hospital with 'flu, and Capel is not long recovered from pleurisy. My own heart, these past few nights, has been keeping a strange rhythm, hop-skip-and-jumping; but this may be no more than indigestion from bully-beef and tea. We set off, the truck in the middle, but soon we had lost everybody—sandstorms blew and visibility was small. However, we made Capuzzo and here found the General's A.D.C., who had lost us all. We sat and waited. The air was clearer and the sun much warmer. At the cross-roads is a cemetery. One grave reads: "*2 Unbekonnter Deutchsland Soldat.*" On it lie two broken rifles, crossed. They were killed on June 16th, 1941. There are other graves, some Italian.

We drove into Bardia, trusting the others would follow. It is a pleasant spot, two or three small bays or inlets, the small town 100 feet higher. We found a large empty house with a broken tennis court behind, overlooking the sea, and called on the Fortress Commander, a Scotsman, serving with the South Africans, to see if we might occupy it. He was most agreeable; he and Forrest found they knew the same small township. Shortly afterwards the remainder of our party arrived. After the desert, this broken house was paradise; in it were a broken billiards table and the remains of two or three beds. The Fortress Commander invited our drivers to cook in his house, and us to eat at his table; we took a bottle of whisky with us: our drivers made stew and we opened tinned fruit and drank the sweet, strong tea that is meat and drink. And we talked. Forrest thinks it isn't more than five to one against the war being over by May 1st. These odds I have gladly laid him. We had much banter over this notion of William's. (Curiously enough, two nights later a Major of Hussars came into our billet on his way back from Benghazi region. I chanced to ask him when *he* thinks the war will be finished. He said: "I can tell you when I believe the General Staff think it will be over—in July so far as Germany is concerned." He was serious and looked the sort of man who might know what the General Staff is thinking. Unfortunately, the General Staff have been wrong in almost every prognostication up to now, and there's no reason to suppose they are right this time.)

January 11th, 1942.

This morning we drove out to see what we could of the battle for Sollum, due to begin at dawn. We had been warned we should probably see nothing, so we had not risen very early. We drove through Capuzzo, ran into the General's A.D.C., who explained where Battle H.Q. was. We were to go down to an aircraft tower near Sollum Barracks and then

cross on foot to the right, finding H.Q. near some anti-aircraft guns. It was a fine cold day, windy, and tiring to walk. A few ambulances stood near the barracks; as none of my companions had a steel helmet, I left mine in the car. Halfway across the escarpment we met one or two South African correspondents returning; shells had just fallen very close, they said—bits of rock had flown all over the place. We decided it would be best if only two at a time went to H.Q., since the spot might be congested; we tossed for the privilege, and Capel and I lost, so we two wandered off by ourselves down the escarpment and along it till we had a fine view of Sollum Bay with its fifty or so houses, some occupied by the enemy and some by us; of the Barracks on our left and the tongue of land beyond it running down to the sea with a pier on its end, and a building or two on the bluff just above it. We sat on lava-like rock looking down; we were 200 or 300 feet above the bay and perhaps two miles from the sea; at our feet was the plain running round the bay. To our right, in a rift in the escarpment which rises there 600 feet, was the notorious Halfaya Pass, but we could see absolutely nothing of what lies in it that is sinister—no guns, no entrenchments, no gun-pits. It looked like an innocent piece of escarpment. Shelling was proceeding—bursts on the point, among the houses and in the sea. But, as usual when it is so far off, it looked more picturesque than dangerous. One detachment of South Africans took some forty prisoners this morning, but soon afterwards came under such heavy mortar-fire that some of the prisoners had to be abandoned after they had been disarmed and their weapons thrown by our men into the sea.

A piece of trench on the bluff was reported to have changed hands two or three times. Apart from shellfire, and even that desultory, little could be seen. We walked back, crouching in places to keep below the skyline, and joined our companions who'd been in the H.Q. sangar. Thereupon shelling grew heavier and Grover and I went down the escarpment again, but once more could see no figures moving. We retraced our way to the aircraft tower near the Barracks and took lunch in the cars. I couldn't understand why the enemy were not shelling this point. A Deputy A.D.M.S. (South African) walked over in his red hat to say he thought we should find a good vantagepoint in the Barracks (our Dominions people are most kind), and after our sandwiches we set off on foot. Capel and I lagged a bit and lost our companions. However we ran into a young officer who, knowing what we sought, said: "Come on; you can go up the water tower"—this at the Barracks. "We've some spotters up there." He added: "I'd a grand view there earlier on —I saw through my glasses a solitary South African chasing a single German on the beach. The South African had a bayonet and he caught the German and stuck him with it." The tower was some 30 feet high, the way up by a newly-fixed wooden ladder, the ladder festooned with signal wires blowing about. The spotters were in the water-tank on top.

It was blowing, so I took off my greatcoat and clambered up (Capel wisely deciding to stay on the ground), and found when I had climbed into the tank that so much dust was moving down in the plain that I could see nothing whatever. I'm a poor hand at climbing about on tall ladders, and I was not sorry to be down again. Halfaya appear to be shelling everywhere—they don't seem to mind whether they shell their own folk in addition to ours, or not.

Learning that we had a trench-mortar post on the far left of the barracks, we walked over. It was brilliantly sunny; a forlorn mule wandered across the empty barrack square, the stony ground was littered here and there with empty shell-cases, broken bits of equipment, the pitiful debris of war. The Italians are fond of painting the walls of their abodes. Somebody had chalked a drawing of a girl and scrawled underneath, in Italian, " My darling." On an adjacent wall was written, in German: " A loyal dog, a brave horse, are worth a thousand women." Inhabitants of Sollum Barracks had better think so, anyhow.

The trench-mortar men had a barrack room—a few holes were in the roof, through which shells had dropped, but it was pretty comfortable. German shells were dropping about 100 yards off, beyond the far wall and slightly down the hill, attempting to destroy an observation post. They punctuated our talk, but nobody took much notice of them. The men clustered round, glad to see us, talked freely, then asked suddenly to see our identification papers, which they were right to do. One said: " We'd a dinkum Nazi prisoner this morning. We offered him something to eat. He said, ' No. Keep it. You're starving.' But after a while he ate two tins of bully and a Christmas pudding." " Christmas pudding? " I said. They said, yes, that was right—they'd had so many puddings sent from home that they had plenty to spare—they'd like to give me one too. And they did, a pudding in a tin, which I shoved, with a struggle, into my greatcoat pocket. They described how the Germans drop their food from aircraft—a tall 4-foot cylinder comes down with four compartments inside; in one compartment there's 4 gallons of water, in another chocolate, in another biscuits and in a fourth " energisers "—a form of sweets. " But they didn't energise *me*," the lad said.

Our men take pleasure in giving the enemy credit for courage. One said to me: " The bravest thing I saw was when we were cleaning up Bardia—a German officer came out and faced one of our tanks, with a grenade in his hand, his arm up ready to throw. He waited till it got within about 20 or 30 yards of him and threw it—and at that moment fell shot through with machine-gun bullets. He knew he was for it."

While Capel and I were with the trench-mortar men, our colleagues were watching through field-glasses and saw, down on the bluff, a German party come out, under a Red Cross, carrying some of their wounded. Our guns ceased fire till the enemy got under cover.

We remained chatting, and as we did so an enemy shell fell much

closer than the rest, shaking the building. The troops were solicitous on our behalf, asking us to go into sandbagged sangars. But we didn't go. What was good enough for them was good enough for us.

January 12th, 1942.

We drove to El Adem to put our despatches on an aircraft. A lovely day, drenched with cold sunshine. Poor M. has already gone to hospital with 'flu, and later in the day we put our driver there also. Capel, who had sat beside him, saw he was feverish and predicted he was 102; so he proved to be. We drove down to Tobruk looking for a C.C.S. whercin to leave him, but nobody could rightly direct us. The signposting was bad. Finally, we had to abandon the search and we deposited him at Capuzzo. This was late in the afternoon. Before that, we had driven across the battlefield of El Adem, but it's now been considerably cleared; however, you still find *wadis* full of burnt-out transport; near Gambut are tanks already rusting. We drove past small German tanks by the roadside bearing the palm-leaf that is the mark of the Afrika Corps. At El Duda, near the post which was named "Tiger" and the scene of fierce fighting, three German tanks are lying within 50 yards of each other. Eight or nine days after the struggle, the dead still were to be seen lying on the field, and round the guns, too. Often enough the Germans didn't trouble to bury our dead—maybe they were too busy fighting.

Our car has no hooter and passing other vehicles has been difficult and tricky.

Wherever our men are encamped, the ground is littered with German dark-green bivvies, which they are using—captured stuff. The bivvies are highly spoken of.

January 13th, 1942.

Further German remarks scrawled up on Sollum Barracks walls: "Will it come true in 1948?" and a second: "Good hunger!"

All Sollum is now ours. South African police battalions, together with the Transvaal Scottish, did the work. We've taken 167 Germans and 126 Italians. The Germans are largely their Oasis troops, known as crack machine-gunners. The Italians often had a frail and waxy look about them and had to pause as they toiled up the *wadi*. The Germans (although a lot were still wearing tropical kit) were in better fettle, which is not surprising since, according to the Italians, the Germans had been eating two meals a day and the Italians one. No love lost here. They had separate cookhouses and separate radio sets.

It has been a tricky job taking Sollum. The bluff is riddled with trenches and gun-pits. One trench we took proved to be a dummy in the sense that the Germans left it and dropped into another 12 feet

below the ridge. We couldn't see them. From their trench they began to lob stick grenades tied to pieces of string of the precise length—a childishly simple dodge which made for accuracy. However, it was the shout by a South African officer of " Grenades ! Grenades ! " (a call to his men to use them) which caused the Germans to put up their hands. They did not fight to the last man or the last gasp. Immediately afterwards, the enemy in another trench forced one of our captured men to hoist a white flag on their behalf (we've found the enemy with white flags manufactured ready for use). We suspected treachery, for we recognised his steel helmet as British, and he had a narrow escape from being shot. Just after dusk last night the South Africans had rushed the last three houses that were holding out in the cluster of fifty or sixty down near the beach; each house had a strong post with three or five machine-guns.

The South Africans are impressed by the fashion in which the Germans —the Sollum Germans, at all events—knew their exact job and their small piece of trench or their house, but little more; a short distance off, they were lost. Similarly, if their own local commander was killed or wounded, they were at a loss. Some of the enemy had been in their houses eight or nine weeks without relief and in trenches or caves even longer. They had drawn supplies either from motor-boats—it's thought even from submarines coming to Sollum Bay—or from Halfaya. One important result of our capture of Sollum is that we believe Halfaya is now isolated both in supplies and in radio. German prisoners have to-day described how they have strained sea-water through cloth and, next, through sand, endeavouring to make it usable for tea or coffee. Their ignorance of the general situation is immense; they believe Rommel is doing well and that soon they would have been relieved. But some are aware that comrades in Russia are having a weary time; one letter from Russia says that the writer has just slept in a building for the first time in eighteen days. He describes how cruel it is, this advancing through snow.

This Battle of Sollum was marked, as all our battles are marked, by gallantry among our men. Seven South African police were held up by machine guns in a house, some 120 yards distant. Suddenly, irritated and seeing no other way out, one man made a dash across that open country for that gun; when he had gone 10 yards three others followed him. As they raced across, bullets were kicking up the dust; but they reached the house. A flash from an explosion followed.

Trench mortar shells exploding in *wadis* have proved to be more devastating than normal shells—the explosion happens to suit a gorge better. Several times our men have had to advance through such a barrage, and one or two who fought in France twenty-odd years ago found this worse. (But whether this is just a trick of the memory is hard to say.) How bare and laconic it is to set down that a South African in charge of forty

prisoners came under heavy fire and stuck to his prisoners till he was killed. Yet that's all I can say. Another tragedy is the loss of a sergeant who, before this Sollum battle, had raided a certain enemy trench at least twice till it had begun to be called by his surname. During this battle he took that trench again, and doing so, was killed. Sometimes to onlookers, it looked as though the police advanced under the very cover of shell-bursts for, after every explosion and the dust and smoke had risen and subsided, the police were seen to be nearer their objective. Sometimes accurate fire pinned our men down among the rocks for long, weary hours, during which time the bitter winds nearly froze them stiff. (The night before the battle, they lay out in the open among the rocks and some of them took off their battle blouses and rolled them up for pillows. They had an issue of brandy, and they needed it.) Recovering our wounded has been a desperate job; snipers have fired, here and there, on our stretcher-bearers. The latter included Zulus and Basutos, who have worked finely. One particular enemy mortar was such a damned nuisance that the South Africans vowed to show its crew no quarter. But when they eventually captured it, they found the crew were Italians—and they hadn't the heart to shoot them. However, they forced the Italians to carry their mortar up the *wadi* and present it to our Colonel.

Differences of outlook among the Nazis appear to be governed partly by age. The young ones didn't want to be captured, but those of thirty-five were not averse from being. One group told a British padre they would have surrendered long ago had they had any means of communicating with us. Most of the enemy had faith in their automatic weapons and would fire them till we were within 20 yards. Then up would go their hands in the expectation of being treated well. (A problem of war: A man fires at you with his tommy-gun as you advance on him with a bayonet. If he hasn't shot you by the time you are within 10 yards, he puts his hands up. What do you do? By the rules, I suppose you take him prisoner.)

Our troops found, down in Sollum, two of our men who had lain out dead since December 12th.

I found a Lieutenant driving about in General Schmidt's car.

January 14th, 1942.

I am thoroughly enjoying this stay in Bardia. We sleep on our camp beds in a partially-ruined room, but James Holburn has fixed a shutter up at the window, and this keeps most of the draught out. On my right is Grover, who lies on the floor—he has no bed; on my left, Forrest. Across the room is Capel, who is fifty-seven, but game as they make them.

I think he regards me and Forrest as violent Reds, though I say to him that when I get back to England I shall be dubbed a reactionary, so swiftly have the Tories swung over to Russia. I could find good things in Russia when the Tories had no word except hatred to bestow on her. Now that the Tories have fallen in love with Stalin, I find my position much what it used to be. I like Communism, with its intolerance, its subjection of all contrary opinion, its imprisoning of all critics, no better than ever I did. Similarly, I thought Winston a great man when many of the Tories detested him. But I do not think, even to-day, that Winston is God. Most folk, however, appear to think he has taken on Divinity.

Our Lancashire driver is a bit of a card. He comes into our room in the morning and says: " I say, there's some tea 'ere if you want it." Then he adds: " 'Ave yo' got yore cups 'andy ? " Then: " An' what do yo' want for breakfast." We suggest facetiously bacon and eggs or a bit of fish. " Nay," he says. " I can't do that. Yo' can 'ave that 'ere sausage an tinned bacon or yo' can 'ave a bit o' stew if yo' like." But nobody wants stew. Sometimes he says: " There's no bread. You'll ha' to do wi' biscuits." When we got back last night from Sollum, I jokingly said that I should have thought a chap of his ingenuity would have rigged up electric light by that time. To-night he has fixed up a line to the lamps on the car and we have a tiny light in our room. He's gashed his thumb, but will have nothing on it. He just squeezes water and stuff out of it and goes on with what he's doing. To-day I went to draw rations from the South Africans. They're better than our customary ones; they included two oranges for each of us, and plenty of onions. To-morrow we are to draw a small sirloin of beef. Lord knows what we shall do with it.

To-day Forrest got disgusted with the dirty state of our room and borrowed a brush from South African signallers. Meantime, I had been operating with a bunch of straw; we got it reasonably swept.

This ruined house is a desirable property. From time to time folk passing through on their way back from Agheila look in to see if it's occupied. We had a Major of Hussars in to drink whisky and water with us to-night. He'd been in touch with a group of South Africans who had had no mail for a long time (this is surprising) and all were anxious to hear if they were fathers; he said they all mate in the spring and the babies are now due. Speaking of the Front, he said: " If it's not sand-storms, it's rain; very cold up there." He said the fighting at the moment is mostly artillery duels, though our " Jock " columns are still pushing the enemy back. We lost a good many tanks in a recent encounter because the enemy got the battlefield and we couldn't recover ours.

He told us of a Captain who, with his group of men, has shot up altogether eighty-eight enemy aircraft. When he drove into one German airfield the Germans thought he was one of their own officers and turned

out the guard for him ! This freebooter is a mild-looking, fair-haired young man, and modest withal.

A good many flares went up round and about Bardia to-night—some of them out at sea. A house in the town caught fire and the South African signallers sallied forth to investigate, but found nothing definite. All rather mysterious. We've been expecting enemy bombers at night, but, happily, none have turned up.

I've been working in the signallers' house, where the electric light is good. An intelligent lad said: " All the stuff you send is doctored, isn't it ? "

During the evening they made coffee—first-rate stuff.

January 15th, 1942.

On our way out of Bardia, we called on General de Villiers, who described the general position as being roughly the same, except that last night the enemy made two sorties out of Halfaya, one to get water from Fig Tree Well and one to get round our position near Point 207. In both cases, we were able to shoot them up. " They've gone back sorrier than they came," he said. A lot of counter-battery work is proceeding. The rumble of artillery comes across the desert.

In Capuzzo we saw the newly-turned earth where twenty-seven South Africans have just been buried. This graveyard holds British, Germans and Italians. Twenty-seven, as war goes, is nothing. But I thought: " There's no more reason why any one of those men should lie there than that I should lie there. Probably much less reason, for they were far younger."

We lost no time in losing ourselves. We were driving without compass and without maps—both necessities in the desert. I don't know why the desert isn't charted and signposted better. You come upon a track and a cross-roads of tracks and there's nothing to tell you whence they come or whither they go. We had the devil of a job; and there were minefields to drive through and skirt. We wasted a long time—and we were not the only ones. A few R.A.C. scouts with some wood and paint could, within a few hours, prevent an awful lot of time and petrol from being thrown away. We got so exasperated that I roundly declared I knew men who'd be better employed, petrified, and turned into direction posts, than doing the jobs they're doing in Cairo.

It was almost dusk when we reached Sidi Barrani; our drivers had had no lunch worth mention (nor had we), but they favoured driving straight on to Mersa Matruh rather than seeking the leeward side of a wall at Sidi Barrani and spending the night in the open. So on we went. It was towards 9 p.m. when we arrived in camp; but they looked after us well; we had supper and were given a tent for four. The corporal who

took our names wrote with his left hand. Now this is remarkable—the number of men in the Army I've come across who are left-handed with a pen. The Wing-Commander of a reconnaissance squadron I visited can write with either hand, or with both at the same time ! Two of the mess waiters are Italian prisoners of war, one a corporal. Their clothes looked good; they were pleasant and willing.

January 16th, 1942.

We had a cavalry reveille this morning—sprightly and tuneful and well-played. The charge for supper and breakfast was 5 piastres. Forrest, Holburn and I drove on to Alexandria with sand sweeping the road, blown by a high wind.

January 17th, 1942.

Strange how one has a hunch sometimes. I didn't much like leaving Halfaya, and no sooner are our backs turned than the fortress has surrendered unconditionally. This is a surprise. I rang up Captain Stephens at Cairo, the Censor, to ask if any statement or communiqué was issued; there was not. But I had some comment to make, and he very kindly did what no censor can be expected to do: he took 300 words down over the telephone from Alexandria to Cairo and has sent it off for me to the *Sunday Times*. One growls about censorship, and naturally so, but most censors are, in person, obliging and do their best; in this case far more than their best.

I had hoped to go with the fleet to bombard Halfaya. This knocks that on the head. The Fleet in this region has taken some hard knocks in the past two or three months. I think of doing a piece about the destroyers' work. These are the gallantest of ships, rescuers of survivors, scourers of the sea, guards of our cruisers and battleships. Several have had a long innings. *Hero*, for example, was at Narvik. Hartin, who knows all these things, tells me she kept shoving her nose round a promontory and withdrawing it almost before it was far round, but not too soon to prevent her popping off her two forrard guns. She did this several times —a dodge timed to a second or two—a thrust out and back almost like plunging a sword in and out—and thus she shot up three German destroyers. Again, she was with Admiral Cunningham when he, with two other battleships, six cruisers and twelve destroyers tackled six Italian battleships, seventeen cruisers and thirty destroyers. Cunningham's ship, *Warspite*, could do twenty-four knots; the other two couldn't muster more than nineteen. After one enemy battleship had been hit, all the remainder of the Italian Fleet turned tail. Cunningham signalled: " Once a Wop, always a Wop—am giving chase "—and off he went, all alone.

The spirit of our men is compact of gaiety. When a friend was going to Tobruk recently, and as he stood on the destroyer's bridge with General Sikorski, the air raid alert was signalled—enemy aircraft were looming up. A moment or two afterwards this destroyer signalled asking a companion destroyer for a piece of information; it was: " What's the French for corrugated iron? " and, when it was vouchsafed, it was asked, again by signal, " Had you to look it up ? "

Pursuing for a moment the lighter side of the war, we've had a war correspondent up in the desert from some international tea association or suchlike. He hails, I think from South Africa and contrived to gain some permits there. He's been wandering about in the desert and has turned in a number of messages, offered to all and sundry papers. The Censor was struck, after reading a number of the despatches, by the fact that each held references to tea. In one he would write (let's say), " The trucks are well-found in all particulars " (setting out what they carried) and adding: " And of course there was the kettle for making the ubiquitous cup of tea." Or: " The men had a hard time and what they appreciated more than anything else when it was over was a cup of hot tea." The truth is he was on safe ground in paying tribute to tea. One drinks it, when one can get it, five times a day in the desert. Yesterday I asked our Lancashire driver, about 7 p.m., when he'd been driving his truck all day with little food—practically nothing since breakfast—if he would like some biscuits and cheese. " Nay," he said. " I never eat owt, without I can wash it down wi' some tea."

January 18th, 1942.

Some further unorthodox signals which have been exchanged in the Mediterranean Fleet came to my knowledge to-day. An Admiral, already a K.B.E., was made K.C.M.G. for his exploits. A friend sent him the following signal: " Fancy, twice a knight at your age. Well done—congratulations."

This was another example of British irrepressibility: We had achieved a naval success but, doing so, sustained the loss of a ship. The signal was sent: " Accept a pat on the back as some compensation for being hit in the belly with a wet fish." To which the reply came: " Blow below belt at my age no significance."

Just before the bombardment of Bardia the weather was bad and the leading destroyer was asked what the prospects were. She signalled: " Very difficult to see whites of eyes to-day."

I spent a couple of hours aboard *Jervis*, flotilla leader. They gave me

an " eggy cocktail " compounded of gin, vermouth, eggs, etc., explaining this was the favourite Sunday morning drink at Malta in peacetime. Powerful to the taste. Drove back with a Lieutenant-Commander, who took an exclusive picture of Hitler's submarine commander they called " Wolf of the Atlantic " when he was landed at Liverpool. I asked him what manner of man he was. He said: " Very arrogant. He swam from his U-boat to our destroyer with all his clothes on, greatcoat, boots, binoculars, medals and all—distance about 50 yards. Time was March." He said that in ten days, at that time, we got three of their best U-boat aces, two of them alive. When the second of them heard, in the British Captain's cabin, that the Wolf had been taken, he burst into tears. The British Captain commented:—" It was the finest sight I ever saw." My informant added that this last December was the best month of the war, so far, for sinking U-boats.

Naval saying: " The sun's over the yardarm, so we can have a drink." " Salt horse" was used to me for describing an officer who doesn't specialise.

I sat in the wardroom chatting to the Engineer Commander, the navigating officer, the flotilla torpedo officer and one or two others. I asked whether they've formed any conclusion as to whether it's best to have much or little clothing on when you are precipitated into the sea. They all agreed that the more the better. One said: " And don't try to swim about—don't exhaust yourself that way. Once there were about 5,000 survivors in the water. Every time we came near they all started to swim towards us. We shouted through megaphones telling them to wait, to stay put. But they wouldn't. Of those 5,000, we only finally rescued about 2,000. Most of the rest were drowned through—in my view—exhaustion."

A second said: " When So-and-So was at Narvik, his destroyer ran ashore in the battle about 150 yards off land. It was winter; ice floated in the sea. Three times he swam from ship to shore, rescuing his men. He was wearing three sets of underclothing, flannel bags and old blue trousers over them, two polo sweaters with tunic and oilskins over the lot. He kicked off his seaboots—nothing else. He said that for the first ten minutes he was very cold, and by that time the water had got through all his clothing. But in the next ten minutes his body slowly warmed the water in his clothing and that water insulated him against the other outer and colder water. He was in the sea three-quarters of an hour and could have stayed in longer."

A third officer said: " The great majority of casualties I've seen have been from burns caused by bombing. In summer weather there's the impulse to throw all clothing off on hot days, but it's best not to—even

the lightest clothes, while getting charred, will protect the skin from burns."

The navigating officer gave me some account of what happened to *Jervis* at the Battle of Matapan. (It is fragmentary, for he spoke from memory, and I took but a few rough notes.) About 8.30 p.m. (he said) the Commander-in-Chief released about ten destroyers from his screen and these were sent off (*Jervis* among them) to search for and destroy an Italian battleship, *Vittorio Veneto*, which aircraft had damaged. This battleship was believed to be making fifteen knots on a bearing of 280. The destroyers were doing twenty-eight knots (one of their number couldn't make more than this), and all kept wedged together, in two lines, five ships in each line, following each other at two cables' length (about 400 yards). Distance separating the two lines was about one mile. Not a light was showing and the night was extremely dark, but you could see the bow wave of the ship behind and also the wake of the ship ahead. At 10 p.m. they saw astern of them a terrific battle going on—this when *Warspite* was sinking enemy ships.

I asked how far off in the darkness they could see an enemy battleship. He said roughly two miles—at that distance you would see the darker mass on the dark water and slowly make out her shape.

Destroyer *Havock* next reported she was in touch (meaning she discerned) an enemy battleship to the east, but soon afterwards she amended the signal to say what she saw was a cruiser. As they switched east and sailed on they passed through groups of men in the water—saw a lot of little lights on the surface—Italian survivors from *Fiume*. (One has to imagine this rushing forward at high speed into deep darkness—the surge and thrust and hum of the ship, hurtling on, giving you an impression of blind power taking enormous risks.) Dark shapes loomed up which turned into an Italian cruiser and some of our destroyers. The cruiser was slightly on fire; *Jervis* put a couple of torpedoes into her as she went by. " She blew up," he said, " with a nice big bang." Presently they came upon another Italian cruiser stopped. " She had no fight in her and we went alongside and secured our starboard side to her port side." Another officer interrupted to ask, chuckling: " Did you throw wires to her ? " and he answered: " Yes, we did, and they took them. She was still flying her ensign. We shouted to those on the fo'c'sle to come aboard, but they replied they couldn't, as we hadn't put out a gangway." The wardroom laughed at this and the Italian refusal to jump. He went on to say that she had about 250 men left of her complement of 1,000. Those 250 came aboard *Jervis*. A lot of them were drunk; they had apparently been at the Chianti. There was an awful mess on the Italian deck—clothes and paper all over the place. (Somebody interrupted to say a searchlight at night on a ship doesn't reveal blemishes, rather does it make her look fine and nice.) By this time it was about 2.30 a.m.

Jervis moved 200 yards off and fired two torpedoes into the cruiser, finishing her off. (An air torpedo had put her engines and boiler-room out of action early in the battle. Those engines had worked the turrets, but a good many of the guns could have been fired as *Jervis* and other destroyers moved about in her range.) " We asked why they hadn't fired at us. They said it was because they knew we should shoot back. We had sent a signal to the C.-in-C., saying, ' Have sunk *Zara* and about to sink *Pola* '; which must have made him think—especially when we forgot to send a subsequent message, so that he must have wondered what had become of us. *Havock* made a remarkable signal that night which went something like this: ' Am holding on to Italian cruiser's tail. Have no torpedoes left. Shall I blow her stern off with depth charges ? ' "

Another officer interrupted here to say that the Italian Captain, when installed in the British Captain's day cabin, sent for our doctor to dress his piles ! In making a return of prisoners, the British added: " and one Italian captain with piles." There was another amusing incident. A British sailor, sitting alongside an Italian, murmured to himself, not suspecting the Italian would understand a word: " I'll bet he's glad he's now joined up with us." The Italian murmured back: " You're telling me."

I asked these officers whether the Italians, apart from their lack of fighting spirit, were good sailors. Was their shooting, for instance, good ? They said that in the beginning of a battle it is very good indeed, and the German shooting also. Both use stereoscopic sights (whatever those are). The gunners receive special diet, don't drink, and get extra pay. As the battle wears on, however, as they are fired on, and especially if their ships are hit, the shooting becomes poor. Our British method is different. Our men feed normally, take their beer, use sights different from the enemy's, may shoot less well in the beginning than as the battle progresses. (But I doubt if any shooting is so good in battle as it is out of battle.)

The navigating officer then gave me some details of an attack *Jervis* and three other destroyers made on a convoy protected by two or three or four Italian destroyers (some doubt exists as to how many were there). This also was a night battle. " Our luck was in," he said. " We had passed the spot where we expected to find them and had swung round and retraced our steps a bit and in that we were fortunate, for when we saw them they were silhouetted against the moon. We had them in sight for twenty-two minutes and they never saw us. We sighted them five miles off and closed to two miles or less—more like one mile probably—when we opened fire. They must have been fast asleep." He said it was what is called a " proper sailors' battle "—the gun crews were magnificent; the battle was confused and with five merchant ships and the

enemy destroyers to shoot at, each gun crew did its own stuff. " At one time a merchant ship tried to ram us and passed astern as our pom-poms loosed off at her. We were fairly close to shallow water all the time and, indeed, one enemy destroyer was forced on to the beach and wrecked there. There was a moment when we were three-quarters of a mile off an enemy ammunition ship and just going to torpedo her when she blew up. The whole air and sky was lit up and the sea became like a boiling cauldron and metal and stuff pattered down on us like hail—one piece an inch thick and big as a large pan lid fell on our deck—part of an enemy tank, I think."

I asked him what his feelings were. Was he aware that in the sinking enemy ships and those exploding men were being killed and wounded? He said: " One didn't have time to think. One thought: ' What a lovely light ' or ' What a beautiful sight.' One thought about it afterwards. I remember feeling it when *Barham* went—seeing her roll over with all those chaps in her, and knowing some of them—I was thinking ' Not many will come out of that.' " He said it is rather awful to realise how little we are sometimes affected these days by tragedies and losses and sufferings—he hoped after the war we should get back to feeling keenly for others again.

I am appalled myself at man's ability to endure horrors and to kill. There have been instances recently out here when Italians have killed our prisoners—we found one batch all stretched out near Tobruk. On our side a regimental C.O. then said grimly: " No more prisoners "—meaning no quarter henceforth. Last night I saw the film " Sergeant York." York was at first a conscientious objector but saw later on that, on occasion, wars must be fought. He was a crack shot and on the Meuse in 1918 shot with his rifle about twenty-five Germans—you see him doing it, bowling them over like rabbits. It was difficult not to feel elated at his prowess and at his destroying the enemy in that way. Three R.A.F. lads in front of me were bubbling over in their seats with delight and laughter, positively rolling about. In a sense it's all very disturbing—how far are we removed from the crowds who enjoyed seeing folk sent to the block or the guillotine?

I am constantly struck—I know it so well and yet I don't cease to marvel at it—at the jollity and sense of enjoyment that pervades these ships. The wardroom is as gay as though the war had no risk. They said, " Come with us for a trip," as though it was a pleasure cruise. They're so fine that it's difficult to feel scared in their company.

We had some talk about the Italians—how most of us feel comparatively little animosity towards them. Later on, however, a Lieutenant-Commander said that during Franco's war in Spain, our warships were more friendly with German warships than Italians. " They sent us crates of beer," he said. At Gibraltar they met socially to some extent,

but the Germans, after a drink or two, were prone to trot out their propaganda, saying: " Ah, but you have all the iron," or whatever it was. They were very serious about it all, and our men were the reverse.

January 19th, 1942.

They tell good stories about a certain Middle East King who was hard up and whose imagination toyed with the idea of building a new palace. But the law said he could not do it without his Parliament's permission, which permission Parliament refused to give. But the King could not be prevented by law from making additions to his existing palace. And orders for this he therefore gave. Sumptuous additions they were, of high cost—additions to the block containing his harem. And they were duly completed. And on the cost the King drew a 30 per cent. rake off from the contractors and so filled his depleted coffers. The block of buildings remains empty.

There was another King who sought to buy from his subjects a certain piece of land to which they were attached both in affection and pocket; and refused to sell. Whereupon His Majesty so changed the irrigation of the neighbouring soil that the plot of land became barren. After being barren for some time, its owners, in despair, sold it to the King for a song—some £25,000. Now began a great work of making fertile with some success so that in due course the King parted with the land for £2,000,000. What do we in the West know of business?

To-day I have been prosecuting my inquiries into the work of our destroyers, to which end I drove down to the docks and went aboard *Jackal*. The docks are stationary, but the taxi-fare is never twice the same.

They showed me in *Jackal* a drawing executed by an officer on, I think, *Griffin*, illustrative of the voyages destroyers made to Tobruk, called in this drawing the " N.B.G. Operation." This comic spirit pervades the work. You have the loading at Alexandria, " more or less out of our control "—gangs of native labour running or loitering to and fro. Then there's the flight of bombers overhead and the caption: " But, Cecil, I tell you they are actually our own," followed by " Ha ! But not always, Ferdinand. Isabel and Rigoletto drop in at most unexpected times "—these being explosive substances. Then there's a drawing of Dan, Dan, the regular man—a lone aircraft which usually appeared about 4 p.m. and dropped a solitary bomb (I saw this happen), and an eloquent little bit wherein the officer of the watch is saying: " Port. No, starboard—as you were "—as the bombs fall and the note: " Zigzagging adds to the fun." Tobruk Harbour, a litter of sunken ships is there, and a drawing of the unloading, showing supplies being chucked in all

directions in all fashions. (Unloading was most expeditious—I believe *Jervis* held the record by doing it in twenty-two minutes.)

Jackal was in the evacuation of Crete and did, like the rest, good work there, taking off some 500 Australian soldiers during the night. Next morning, knowing a further bombing was almost certain, my Lieutenant informant went down to them, saying that if they cared to come up on deck, bringing their Bren guns, they might find something to use them on. About thirty Brens were duly taken up, and the Australians, to ensure they would be in good order, kept popping off a couple of rounds now and then while waiting. Sure enough, the Junkers 87s appeared. The Australians said they had never had such a good morning's sport. I asked if they shot any aircraft down. He said they saw none fall in the sea—some hits may have been scored. But later on, as *Jackal* and *Orion* (cruiser) sailed off, *Orion* was hit and the Junker 87 which struck her, coming down as low as 300 feet to drop its bombs, hurtled past *Orion* and dived straight into the sea about 50 feet from *Orion*. " It looked like a suicide squad to me," he said. *Jackal* was then some 1,500 yards distant. *Imperial* had had a near miss the day before and now found, out at sea, that her steering was wrong, so that she went round in partial circles.

Jackal went a second time to Crete—this occasion to the south of the island. By this time the atmosphere was tense and much excitement was expected. " We went in and dropped our hook very quietly—lowered our boats very quietly too and with these took off the troops. A number of lighters were used also. We had air escort this time and not a single enemy machine came near us."

He told me of a small action off Syria in which *Isis*, *Hotspur*, *Janus* and *Jackal* were engaged. The enemy were two French destroyers which had five 5·5 guns against our 4·7s, and with a speed of thirty-six knots against our thirty-two. It was a hot summer's afternoon and men were stripped to the waist. *Isis* was bombarding the shore and the others were her screen. Suddenly, look-out on *Jackal* reported objects on the port bow. " Lo and behold, they were these two French destroyers. We formed line ahead ready for battle. The Frenchmen began to fire at once—one using red bricks and the other green ones" (a device for knowing each other's salvoes). *Janus* was hit and stopped, but continued firing her guns. Several people on her bridge were killed. *Jackal* went on, zig-zagging to avoid French shells, not knowing how seriously *Janus* was hit, closing the range as fast as possible in the circumstances. *Isis* abandoned her bombardment of the coast to join in this small battle, so that the Frenchmen were now pursued by three British destroyers—a situation which did not appeal to the French, for they withdrew, once ceasing fire for fifteen minutes and " making smoke " (a screen) and afterwards

firing again. In all *Jackal* fired 611 shells in an hour and a half, taking most of the enemy's brunt. " I visited our gun crews during a lull, and I don't think I ever saw the men in such good spirits—they were fine."

Jackal has been struck twice, once by shell, once by bomb—the spot almost identical each time.

Nautical phrase: " So-and-So bought a torpedo off Tobruk."

A destroyer steams, on the average, about 12,000 miles in three months. Convoys from Norway sometimes progressed no faster than two and a half knots—as much as, sometimes, a tramp in heavy weather could do. The destroyer in that event would make a sweep to and fro across the front, doing about fifteen knots.

Ships' captains grow expert at sending neat signals; one at Alexandria is apt with those from the Bible. When the First Lord spoke on the radio, mentioning the work of Sir James Somerville, I believe Sir James signalled him, giving Number So-and-So—this number was one that soldiers can quote in cables home (the cable company has a long list of stipulated messages known here and in London. You telegraph the number and at the other end they write down the greeting that number stands for). In this case it was: " Wonderful thrill to hear your voice over the radio ! " Sir James is accomplished at signals.

They tell an amusing story of a Torpedo Lieutenant who, in a bombing raid, crept under his torpedo tubes for safety. There he found a seaman already lying. " What the devil are you doing here ? " asked the Lieutenant.

Kimberley was lying alongside. *Kimberley* has had the distinction of sinking enemy destroyers both in the Arctic and in the Red Sea in the same year, which led us, including the doctor, to talk of clothing. The bugbear, said the doctor, is to find satisfactory gloves. Officer of the watch on the bridge has to make notes, and writing in gloves, anyhow, is difficult. The doctor thought gloves with leather palms and waterproof backs were the thing—that or greasy skeepskin. But maybe mittens, leaving fingers free, were best of all. " The other problem " said an officer, grinning, " is inability to smoke on the bridge." They said, when they returned from Haifa, they flew the Carter Paterson flag because they had carried so many troops and supplies.

The young doctor of *Kimberley* had some interesting views on war psychosis. In England he had a boy in his ship who suddenly, while passing shells to a big gun, became paralysed from the waist down. He wasn't really close to the gun—no question of blast, but merely one of

anxiety. During his treatment, the doctor got two burly men to drag the lad along the deck with his toes touching till, gradually, he could walk with a limp. The lad went ashore and into hospital. The nurse said to him, " Poor boy ! " and the lad, under this sympathy, at once became paralysed again.

This doctor, who wears the D.S.C. ribbon, said: " We don't allow men to try and climb aboard after being in the water as survivors—we've had too many who have slipped back into the water—either they are too exhausted or their hands are so coated in oil they can't grip. We get two of our men to wait in the water up to their waists and help the man up. It's advisable to have a belt on if you're going into the sea, a belt or something a rope can be passed through. That's vital in being rescued. The next job is to get 'em warm again—they're usually too weak to be passed down to the engine-room, which in a sense would be the best place to restore warmth, and mess decks have little or no heat. I've tried getting two stout men to lie down alongside a rescued man and covered all three in blankets—that has worked quite well. You can often get a man warm in three-quarters of an hour—after that it's a case of giving him huge quantities of hot cocoa and stuff." I said that I supposed in cold weather and northern waters a man's heart would give out in about twenty minutes. He said, " Yes. That is about it." But in the Mediterranean, where the water is still about 62 or 64 degrees, he ought to last four hours. He said that on one of the cruisers after Crete they had a few cases of men breaking down and weeping—this the result of heavy bombing. A stoker in Tobruk Harbour was similar—couldn't control his weeping—had to be invalided out. But those men are exceedingly rare. He thought it would be a good plan to give the men stimulants in tablet form, but the difficulty was to find a safe one—he thought strychnine the best. Benzidrene suited some and not others—it didn't suit him, for instance. (It doesn't appear to suit me either. I took a tablet the other day—my heart speeded up and I got a headache.) We talked of sleep—during Dunkirk he went for five days on about one and a half hours sleep a day. I asked him what his faculties were like after that. He said he slept as he walked the deck. We next spoke of rescuing men fallen overboard. The First Lieutenant said that nowadays on some ships there's a rule that nobody must jump overboard after them—this rule depends on the ship's Captain: some issue it, some don't. At Liverpool he knew of a case when an officer of the watch went overboard after a man who proved, on rescue, to be dead. The brave officer was reprimanded by his Captain, who said: " You were at that time my repre sentative. You had no business to leave the ship." Which, I think, is quite sound. It seems to me to depend a good deal on the importance to his country of the drowning man. Nobody, I suppose, would suggest that Winston Churchill ought to leap overboard to rescue an able seaman.

Is a man called on to risk his life to save a man of whom he knows nothing and who may be a damned scoundrel? I think not. Mottistone describes in one of his books how, when walking the beach in the Isle of Wight, on a wild night, he heard a cry for help out at sea and saw an arm uplifted. He plunged into the sea and swam out—to find a branch of wood with a seagull perched on it crying out. He was exceedingly gallant, but I doubt if he were justified. However, it's a case of reflexes, I dare say—men don't often weigh the pros and cons in these circumstances. The man who does isn't likely to risk his life at all. From this the talk turned to decorations. I said what I've argued before —that we're too niggardly. But both the doctor and First Lieutenant thought the reverse—they dislike decorations of any sort. The Lieutenant said that, for example, the bos'n's mate has never been less than superb on every occasion, yet he's done nothing spectacular that earns a decoration. All the same, he's been far more valuable than a man who, in general, is very ordinary, but who on some half-hourly occasion does something striking. All very sound. But why not decorate the bos'n's mate, too? We have established and use the system. Having done so, we make too few awards. So I argued. The First Lieutenant shook his head, saying: "After Crete we were *ordered* to recommend people for medals." He didn't think much of that notion. For myself, I like to be able to distinguish between those who've done the dirty work, long and valiantly, and those who have not. To which my friend Brigadier G., D.S.O. and bar, M.C. and bar, said to me recently. "A man does no more than his duty. That's what he's there for." He doesn't believe in decorations, either. In his view, too many have been awarded that were never earned.

I called on Rear-Admiral Glennie in a destroyer depot ship—he commands the destroyers. I wanted to know what the qualities are of the ideal destroyer commander. *Kingston*, a destroyer, lay alongside. The Rear-Admiral's cabin has a painting of the first ship of her name on the wall—a bluff sailing ship, a reminder of what's gone before. The Navy seems steeped in tradition. The frigates of Nelson's day are the cruisers and destroyers of to-day. He said a destroyer commander must be able to stand on his own feet, be independent; I gathered their age grows younger as the war goes on; he himself commanded a destroyer at the age of twenty-four in the last war, but they were smaller ships then, carrying a crew of about 100, whereas some to-day are manned by nearly twice as many. He talked of their duties out here—in the Syrian campaign they were used even as artillery on the flank. He thought the Tobruk run would be the outstanding feature, seen in perspective. "The dream of the destroyer is the torpedo attack at night, but there haven't been many opportunities of that." They were christened "maids of all work" in the last war, and that was true to-day.

My host's ship was darkened when I emerged to grope my way behind

a guide down to *Kingston*, and when I finally left the latter it was to go down a Jacob's ladder into the boat. Happily, the distance was short. Commander X. of *Kingston* has had her since she was built and has won the D.S.O. and D.S.C. in her. As an example of what falls to a destroyer's lot, *Kingston's* record will do as well as another. Thus: She was with the first four Canadian convoys. Nothing much happened. Her first exploit was sinking a submarine or, rather, blowing leaks in her. Another destroyer had sighted this submarine on the surface, but when the submarine dived couldn't do much about it, as her Asdic gear had broken down. She gave the position and *Kingston* located the submarine in about ten minutes. (They had been part of a cruiser screen and two of them were detailed for the hunt.) Going ahead at high speed, they made the attack—they have to move swiftly to dodge the explosion of the depth charges they fling behind them. The apparatus for throwing the depth charges to right and left didn't work, but the three rolled over the stern right enough. No result followed. The second destroyer now tried with no success, and *Kingston*, having got into position for a second attack, dashed forward once more. Once more her throwers failed to work, but three other depth charges went over the stern, and just as her Commander was growling about the failure of the throwers twice in succession, the look-out shouted joyfully that the submarine was surfacing. *Kingston* took off the German commander and twelve of her crew and had them aboard for four days. He said the German commander was a decent chap (this was November, 1939), and *Kingston* treated them well. I saw a letter of gratitude written from the prisoners of war camp by the German commander. Commander X. was awarded the D.S.O. for this good piece of work, and the German wrote again, saying he had read of it in *The Times*, and sending his congratulations! *Kingston's* next job after this was standing by the rear half of a tanker—the tanker had been blown in two and the rear half still floated. She was an extraordinary sight, and they could hardly believe their eyes on coming across her. In May, 1940, *Kingston* moved to the Red Sea and remained ten months. In the beginning a certain amount of activity occurred with submarines—the Italians had eight submarines in the Red Sea, but after a fortnight the number was but three! " About five of us had a hand in sinking one of them. We sighted him on the surface about two miles off; he dived and then, silly ass, he came up again. We caught up with him while still on the surface and he chucked his hand in." During those ten months the only Italian successes were one ship hit by a bomb and one (foreign) tanker—which was lagging behind her convoy—torpedoed. *Kingston*, being a trifle doubtful of the good intentions of this tanker, had put an officer and four men aboard her; these, when she was torpedoed, tried to persuade the crew to stay on the ship, arguing that tankers don't readily sink; but they wouldn't remain. In fact, the tanker finally did go down, but the men got off safely. *Kingston's* young officer

said the worst part of it all was being kissed on both cheeks by the Captain, who hadn't shaved for some days. When the foreign ship was struck, the wireless operator yelled "*Torpedi ! Torpedi !*" and promptly dived overboard, with the result that no messages could be sent out.

Kingston's next task was landing a commando of troops—they were a diversion, but, in fact, they took the town before the other troops got there ! It was a bloodless victory.

Now came Crete. Two days before the Battle of Crete they were on patrol; they had been told of a certain number of small bodies of enemy at Heraklion, and *Kingston* approached at night with considerable caution. Three or four small boats were knocking about. The first thing *Kingston* heard was an Austrialian voice saying: "For Christ's sake take that —— oar out of my —— ear !" They took aboard an Australian officer of an anti-aircraft battery and twelve men. They proved invaluable when, later on, attacks were made by aircraft, for they brought shells to the pompoms and the officer went about during hours when there was no time to get food, giving the men pieces of chocolate. "The air wasn't thick with aircraft, but quite a number were flying about." *Kingston* stood by *Greyhound*, which sank, and had herself three near misses. There came a moment when they were again attacked and had to leave rafts and boats behind and push on. *Fiji* was struck and, rescue work being infinitely dangerous in daylight, it was decided to withdraw temporarily and return after dark—which they did and took on board 325 men. *Kingston* swept up and down raking them in—fortunately a good many of the men had torches. *Kingston* was using nets and her own seamen went into the bottom of those nets to drag in survivors. "The last six men took twenty minutes to get in—I was pacing up and down the bridge." All told, they had 420 men aboard; the crew had had no food all day beyond bits of chocolate; the petty officer steward's job in battle was to supply, not men, but guns. "Almost everywhere you went you found men sitting about who were really walking wounded." But that wasn't the record number of passengers. One night they took from Greece 900 on one voyage and next day a further 500. In all, *Kingston* has carried thousands of passengers. All those 900 were given tea—for long hours the petty officer cook never stopped brewing tea and he cooked whatever food the men could produce. But those 900 made the ship unfightable and almost unmanageable and no time was lost in completing the voyage.

Kingston made eleven runs to Tobruk, once carrying sixty-five wounded, and on a second trip taking a ship in tow.

He took me down to the wardroom, and we talked about signals—somebody reminded us of the occasion when in the dark two ships collided. The wireless operator of one, who had had the misfortune to be mined on a previous voyage, thought he was again blown up in this way and sent out a hurried signal saying they had struck a mine. The

other ship signalled back—something of a record in dry humour on such an occasion—" Not mine—me ! " Commander X. said it was when four destroyers had deliberately drawn the battle ship *Bartolomeo Colleoni* in pursuit of them and towards the waiting cruiser *Sydney* that one destroyer signalled to the other: " Don't look round now, Gertie, but I think we are being chased ! " (But this witticism is an old story and of doubtful authenticity.)

(In this group of officers in the wardroom was a young midshipman who has survived *Hood*—he climbed, following another officer, through a window on the bridge and was in the sea on a raft for three and a half hours. Another young officer had survived two ships.)

January 20th, 1942.

I sailed to the submarine's depot ship to renew associations. Chartered a *felucca*—good wind, choppy. We started off under wind and sail, but halfway the Arabs dexterously hooked on to a small drifter. They held the customary indignation meeting when they asked 10 piastres and I gave them 5.

It's a great pleasure to be in these ships. The ship's cook had made for Captain Raw an elaborate cake, covered with icing on which submarines sailed. We had some talk, during which he said it's computed that of all the strain felt in a submarine's crew, 70 per cent. of it falls on the commander. Thirty-eight is laid down as the top age for a commander; odd members of the crew go to sea older—turned forty perhaps. The quality of our men continues to be very high. Consider this: the young navigating officer of a submarine was coming out here and was wrecked. With over fifty others, he took to a boat, of which he assumed command. He was about twenty-one. He at once rationed them to a cupful of water a day. The boat was 650 miles from land in one direction and 1,600 in another, but he knew that if he took the longer route he would have less to battle against and he accordingly chose that route. He was the only man aboard who knew aught of sailing. The voyage occupied over fifty days, during which some thirty of the occupants died. But he brought the boat and the remainder to South America. When they saw land, he didn't like the look of the surf and although one can imagine everybody's eagerness to get ashore, he lay off land for a further twenty-four hours till the surf abated. When he got back to England, he was given a fortnight's leave and is now out here. He sounds something of a rival to Captain Bligh of *Bounty*.

January 21st, 1942.

Talking this morning to a Lieutenant in *Griffin* he told me how a destroyer he was in was sunk off Namsos. A Frenchman was sunk just pre-

viously, off which they had taken about 85 people. In addition, they had some sixty soldiers. The bombs struck them near enough to the bridge to blow him and others upwards into the air 6 or 7 feet. He came down, falling on his side, his hands and face covered with blood from tiny splinters. The ship took about three-quarters of an hour to sink, but during that time men trapped in the fo'c'sle and unable to get out had their heads out shouting. The ship was on fire and men down below, in addition to those in the fo'c'sle, were slowly being burned and drowned or choked with smoke and fumes. A number escaped miraculously from down below, emerging into the icy water and coming up and being pulled aboard. Two other destroyers came alongside and finally, as the quarterdeck or what remained of it was awash, my informant walked on to a destroyer, not having got wet higher than the waist.

This Lieutenant has been a survivor a second time from *Hyperion*—she was probably mined, but on this occasion only about a dozen lives were lost and rescue for the remainder was comparatively simple. Destroyers did that. It's clear that destroyers have been the main agents of rescue. *Griffin* alone, for instance, has rescued in all several thousand people from the sea—taken this number from the water.

Havock within the past few days has once more been engaged on that work. A merchantman loaded with some 400 troops and ammunition was bombed and sunk—a bomb penetrated the ship and set her on fire. By the time *Havock* got alongside men had jumped into the water and others had left by boat. This made rescue very difficult, and *Havock* cried to them over the loudspeakers to stay aboard, as she was coming alongside. *Havock* didn't know, till she *was* alongside, that the merchantman's Captain was expecting his ship to blow up at any moment—he had several hundred large bombs aboard, besides ammunition. Small arms ammunition was popping off all the time. They rescued several hundred people; only thirty or forty were lost. *Havock* crushed a few men, which was inevitable.

A volume could be written on these rescues. *Griffin* took from the oily sea a good many survivors of *Galatea*, which was torpedoed when I was a few hundred yards off her. *Griffin's* Captain told me how they did it: "One sails into the middle of the great patch of oil and then allows the ship to drift. The ship drifts quicker than men in the water and as you go by, you pick them up. Then you emerge from the patch and sail round to the far side and begin to drift through again. We stayed about four hours doing that." In those conditions of drifting by, it is largely luck who is picked up first, and some poor souls are lost from exposure while waiting their turn.

To go back for a moment to the destroyer off Namsos, one of those men who miraculously emerged from the sea was given a thin line to grasp. His hands were too numb and those on board could not help him enough to get him up. He had to wait in the bitter sea till the destroyer

sank enough for her anchors to be in the water so that he could get a foothold on them; then, he was able to lever himself up.

January 22nd, 1942.

In *Griffin* I was handed a narrative of the action off Cape Spada in which the Italian cruiser *Bartolomeo Colleoni* was damaged so that she came to a standstill and was ultimately sunk by us. It is admirably done and the pity is that it was not prepared long months ago. Some extracts will give the temper of it: "When a misty sun appeared behind them, the ships' companies were fallen out from their action stations. Soon the smell of frying bacon floated up the bridge voice pipes and those on watch glanced at the clock, impatient for relief." However, two cruisers on the starboard bow were sighted, "and they're Italian, too," added the look-out drily. "Thus was the Ægean idyll of silver sea and sky, grey ships and whispering bow waves shattered . . . and at once the heart-lifting clanging of alarm bells brought half-clothed men tumbling from below. They saw from heeling decks as the destroyers turned away under full rudders, two Italian cruisers, ghostlike yet clear, which had come out of the mist ahead, no more than ten miles away." The task of the destroyers' commander was to "play" a superior force which could outgun him and was several knots faster, till his own cruiser, *Sydney* could appear on the scene. The narrative adds: "There is no certain outcome to such sport." The Italians didn't press home their attack, but none the less our destroyers spent some time dodging salvoes and transmitting information to the rear. An old Greek freighter was encountered, the crew of which, at this "Olympian disturbance of the morning's peace," left her stopped and pulled clear in their boat. The men lay on their oars and watched as shells shrieked across the sky and coloums of water shot up. When *Sydney* appeared along with another destroyer, the Italians ran for it. "The haze of the morning had now lifted. The sun shone on water that became a brilliant blue and the first of the day breeze whipped the sparkling tops and lifted their fresh spindrift over the destroyer forecastles. The white wakes, the bright bunting, the orange flash of cordite and its brown smoke blown back across the straining grey ships—all in the brilliant cold light of the early Ægean forenoon, would have made the scene a delight to any painter of sea battles."

When *Hyperion* finally came up to *Bartolomeo Colleoni*, she was a sad sight, "and yet showed fewer outward signs of damage than might have been expected, as most of the British shells that hit her had penetrated her thin plating and burst within. Here and there along her length fires could be seen burning inside through the shell holes in her plating, and a large fire roared around the foot of her bridge superstructure, com-

pelling the few of her crew who had remained on the bridge to jump for their lives from the invading flames as the destroyers approached. On her forecastle was the riddled wreck of her reconnaissance seaplane—which, it was afterwards learned, was to have flown off at dawn, had not its catapult broken down. For such a small cause, not only had the ship been lost, but also an unequalled opportunity of sinking some British destroyers. . . . The cruiser's four turrets appeared undamaged, and were trained and laid on the starboard quarter. The Italian ensign still flew—just stirred in the breeze at the peak, and astern of her, in the water, floated the vast majority of her ship's company." Our destroyers saved 555 Italian sailors from the sea—fifty-one, including the captain were badly wounded, and ultimately, with 150 Italians on board, most of them stark naked, *Hyperion* set off to rejoin *Sydney*.

January 26th, 1942.

To-day, at a conference with Sir Walter Monckton, he told us, in confidence for the moment, that we have evacuated Benghazi. This is grave news. It puts the seal, so to say, on von Rommel's new thrust, which began with being a reconnaissance in strength to see how strongly we were holding our gains, and, finding he could push on, he has done so. Official news here in Cairo is, beyond the communiqué, virtually nil. A colonel of Intelligence Branch came to the midday conference (which preceded Monckton's) to say that G.H.Q. has actually got no information as to what, in this confused battle, is really happening. "We shall have to ask you to bear with us," he said. I asked him if he could comment on the German claim to have destroyed or captured 143 tanks. He repeated that he had no information at all. He seemed so genuinely without knowledge and appeared to be so doing his best that one hadn't the heart to question him further.

I asked Monckton what is to be said to the folk in England who, if our withdrawal in the desert brings us back to the Libyan frontier, will want to know whether our military have misjudged the situation or failed to foresee this fresh enemy onslaught. He replied that he would have to ask G.H.Q. about that.

But whatever happens, we destroyed most of Rommel's armament, defeated them in pretty level fight, and proved our men's superiority. What we have been unable to do is to prevent his reinforcing with new tanks and new aircraft and fresh men. But I don't think our retreat will be as spectacular as last year's.

January 31st, 1942.

A Dominions medical officer twice captured by the enemy and who twice escaped—all within three weeks—states in his report that when he

was taken the Germans were in high spirits: they had just been told that Moscow had fallen, that Russia would capitulate within a week, that England would then be invaded and the war would be over this year, and they would then be sent home. These "pep" talks were given them before most of their heavy pieces of fighting. The method is not to give them any news for several days and then to administer a ration of news as a stimulant. Immediately before the second phase of the desert offensive, the Germans were informed they had captured 7,000 prisoners and destroyed 700 tanks and 156 planes outside Tobruk. The Germans appeared to believe it, and to think their news was reliable, asserting it was checked and doubly-checked before being issued.

When this officer's hospital was taken over by the Italians, thieving and looting began at once. The Italian doctors had poor skill and knowledge and were even reluctant to dress wounds, saying they were doctors and not surgeons. Italian medical staffs were armed, but not the Germans. He found Italian wounded could not bear pain and cried out loudly at minor injuries. He saw (he says) numbers of self-inflicted wounds. Relations between Germans and Italians were extremely poor, and much squabbling went on over captured vehicles. German wounded who were treated by our medical men said they were lucky to be in our hands and not those of Italian doctors. When our people complained to the Germans about Italian treatment regarding food and water, the Germans answered: "What can you expect from the Italians?" A German doctor said that in his mess at El Adem they had many British doctors, but they would not allow entry to an Italian. "The Italians [the Dominions doctor goes on] made full use of the position of the hospital to help them in their military operations, the hospital area being at all times placed between their guns and the British. Once they placed a gun immediately beneath a Red Cross flag. The Germans kept their guns and armoured vehicles from the hospital area."

It's rather surprising to me that the Italians show up so badly in this officer's report; but I have not seen him, and it's difficult to know just how much reliance can be placed on it.

February 2nd, 1942.

Benghazi is definitely lost to us. We re-entered that town on Christmas Eve and stayed just over a month. One could imagine the bemused Benghazi folk addressing a pained remonstrance, thus: "Hi! Will you gentlemen make up your minds who's going to live in this town and which salute we'd better be most adept at? And could you agree that our docks don't exist, instead of piling destruction on destruction?"

Good to see so many young officers walking about wearing their new D.S.Os. and M.Cs. How young some of our majors and colonels are and how admirable that is !

February 7th, 1942.

I breakfasted to-day with Philip Jordan and Oliver Baldwin. Philip is just back from Russia and on his way to the Far East. He thinks the Russians will defeat the German Army outright next autumn.

They had, between them, two good witticisms on a certain Minister at home—first that his eyes blaze with insincerity, and second that he is like a dinner gong, but without a dinner to follow.

I ran into a Major friend of the Hussars, just back from Msus in the desert—the front line. They've been doing, at times, fifty miles a night on the withdrawal. They were in their armoured cars near Agheila and suddenly the German tanks—he put them at 110 tanks—came through them. A night or two later they themselves broke through the German lines—" you can do it at night." He went on: " One of our troop leaders—a new chap—got involved with some German tanks and he and his cars were shot up and he and six men taken prisoner. He was shoved in a German tank and taken along. After a day or two, they put him and his men into a lorry and said, 'Now you're going back to Tripoli.' They started off in charge of a sergeant, who, they soon saw, didn't know his way and was getting lost. After driving all day, they were back where they started from. ' If I were you,' said our young Hussar officer blandly, ' I should go *this* way '—pointing in the direction where British troops might be. The German sergeant amiably adopted this suggestion, being hopelessly lost himself. They drove on and eventually ran into South African armoured cars. ' Ah,' said the German, putting up his hands, ' now I am your prisoner for a change.' "

My Major friend said that he could almost have cried on one or two mornings when he woke up and realised again what he knew the night before, of course, that we were withdrawing. He got to Agheila last year and retreated—and we're doing the same thing again. He said some of our older N.C.O.s are depressed—they've gone through this before. He spoke sympathetically, too, of the fact that officers get a whisky or two in the evening—" We drink it neat now—no water with it—the water is salt "—and after a couple of drinks occurrences that looked pretty trying during the day begin to seem funny. But the men have no whisky—nothing to help them lift up their hearts. Matches are so short that they've been keeping fires burning to light cigarettes. He's back on five days' leave after three months' fighting. He said: " You get used to

the desert—I find it hard to adjust myself to Cairo." We spoke of Brigadier "Jock" Campbell, who's recently been given the Victoria Cross. He said: "I saw him the day the South African brigade were overrun. You know, those armoured command vehicles brigadiers have—he stands on top of his with a flag—everything popping off at him and taking no notice of it. There he was, rallying people. All the lads call him 'Jock'—sometimes 'Colonel Jock.' The chaps say: 'Is it true Colonel Jock's coming?' Their morale goes up, when he arrives."

P. J. says he was allowed to go to the Russian Front four times, which was three times more than the British Mission. He believes that by the spring they'll have as large an army as they began the war with. Their clothing and equipment are good—doubts if they are short of anything apart from tanks and isn't sure they're short of tanks. He believes the German casualties are in the neighbourhood of 2,000,000; The Russian casualties between 3,000,000 and 4,000,000. But the Russian towns are still full of young men. He says he's been very short of vegetables—plenty of meat in Russia, but no vegetables. He feels very tired. For some twenty-eight days they assured him every day there would be an aircraft for him "to-morrow." Waiting is a tiring business.

It was diverting to sit at breakfast while he and Baldwin hurled stories at one another—whispers of this and stabs of that. Baldwin has been in Eritrea, Abyssinia, Syria and so forth. Philip, who has been absent from the Middle East about a year, has picked up the threads in five minutes. I'll wager he already knows infinitely more about what's going on than I do. Witty, charming, alert, he's a born foreign correspondent, but also blessed with a power of indignation and a scarifying pen.

February 8th, 1942.

Golfed with Ronald Ferguson, who runs the broadcasting here. His handicap is fifteen and mine is eight (or was), but he beats me almost every game we have. To-day, however, I walloped him 7 and 6 and took the bye 4 and 2. It must be said that he was recovering from a cold. He is a Scotsman of forty-seven; kindly and most efficient. There's no doubt that for reliability and workmanlike efficiency, the Scots are difficult to equal. The two war correspondents I've a particularly high regard for, Willie Forrest and James Holburn, are both Scots. They worked as youths on the *Glasgow Herald* together. To-night I went along to the Children's Half-hour which Ferguson and his wife Joan, together with a few friends, run. It's largely unrehearsed, nobody gets paid, and there's a liveliness and naturalness about it which is agreeable. His nephew was with us, Second Officer of a merchant ship. His nephew's cabin is 9 feet by 6 feet by 6 feet—and he's lucky (he said). Another cabin of that dimension is occupied by four men. His ship was recently forced

to beach herself in a channel owing, in his view, to ill-judged navigation of a small naval ship, which dashed past them and got herself on a sandbank and swung round dead in their track. A naval inquiry was held which exonerated the naval ship and put the blame on the merchant ship. Not unnaturally, there's feeling over this. I am reminded of Lord Hewart's remarks—that he spent his time trying cases in which two stationary vehicles collided with one another; and no doubt there are rights and wrongs on both sides in this naval *v.* merchant ship case. What seems clear is that the President of the Court, a naval Captain, needs an experienced lawyer to sit with him and give rulings on what is, and is not, evidence. It would be easy for a naval officer, holding an inquiry of this sort, to be less impartial than he ought to me. I don't say that he was, but it's a possibility to be guarded against. I think we're in danger of allowing the Navy to become sacrosanct. Nobody hesitates to criticise the Army and our generals, but our Navy and admirals and our Air Force and its chiefs get off almost scot free. The Navy's policy of supression of losses is doubtless based on sound theory—the withholding of knowledge from the enemy—but quite obviously that policy can, on occasion, help to hide blunders and inefficiency.

This young merchant officer spoke of sea regulations still being in force that were drawn up about 1850—some regarding food, for instance. If a shipping company goes beyond them, it does so to the extent it chooses. He said: " I am shipwrecked here. I am entitled to two months' pay during the time I take to get home. But the shipwreck took place some months ago and it will take me at least two and a half to three months to get back to Britain. During that extra period of time I get no pay. We bring goods for the Naafi, but I'm not allowed to shop at the Naafi, as the Army and Navy do." He said that officers' quarters on the newer ships are much improved, but the men's are not improved in proportion—attributable, in his view, to the officers' trade union fighting harder than the men's.

A bank official I met to-night said he shared my views about the undesirability of officers who are doing civilian jobs wearing uniforms. (He had been reading *Towards the Morning*.) He said: " I've seen a good deal of it here in Cairo where so many men who lost their jobs got into the Army and, knowing less about weapons than we in the Home Guard, walk about in uniforms and look like heroes."

February 11th, 1942.

Our foresight on broadcasting is so diminutive and our knowledge of the whereabouts of radio stations so small that the last bomb we dropped on Massawa blew the station up !

An Air Marshal just out from England gave a lecture to the correspondents last night. I missed this talk because I had to take to bed; I had had an inoculation for yellow fever the night before and lightheartedly drank whisky on top of it. Last night I developed a temperature. The Air Marshal, I gather, was annoyed over criticisms in the newspapers at home. Some of these men are highly sensitive. They appear to think that if their view is such and such, nobody should question it. But the history of wars, and especially our wars, is littered with blunders and misjudgments on the part of our military and other leaders. I've a wholesome respect for the French wit (I think) who said: "War is far too serious a business to be left to the military."

Singapore seems to be on the point of being lost. Millions of tons of oil are being burned by us. A base which cost a fabulous sum is being destroyed. Our imagination in this regard seems to have been laggardly in realising that the time was coming when sea power unprotected by air power was largely useless—as witness the sinking of *Repulse* and *Prince of Wales*. But, apart from this failure of vision, our lack is fundamental—that of men and ships and aircraft. The notion that the Commonwealth, scattered over the earth's surface, could ever defend itself, unaided by other countries, was always ludicrous. Our only hope was a League of Nations to tackle the aggressor as soon as he showed his head. This our natural enemies foresaw. If our Tories had been wise, they'd have been enthusiasts for the League. As it was, they were lukewarm. A wise imperialist would have espoused the League of Nations heart and soul. However, although we are going through a tough time, and with tough times to come, we and our Allies, provided we stick together, cannot be finally defeated. The Axis and the Japanese are like fifteen-handicap golfers who've been playing every day for months, while we, with a handicap of six, are woefully out of practice. At the moment we are still hitting them all over the course. But soon we shall be hitting them down the middle. And, finally, we shall vanquish the enemy four and two.

I hear a weekly journal bestows some praise on my last book. Reviewers are often kinder than they ought to be. But what did the old actress say: "To hell with criticism—praise is good enough for me." Praise delights me (when I get it). I always liked Edgar Wallace for his innocent pleasure in sitting in a box at the theatre when his plays were being performed, and roaring at his own jokes. And I remember Gertrude Lawrence saying to me with fine frankness: "I get a hell of a kick out of walking into the Savoy grill and seeing people nudge one another and say, 'There's Gertie Lawrence.'" And what did G. B. S. say: "I am reading my own works with increasing admiration." Vanity, vanity; but the desire for fame and distinction has resulted in a lot of good work being done.

February 12th, 1942.

Lunching yesterday with a young mercantile marine officer who drank beer, I asked him what they drink on board ship. He said, laconically: " Nothing. You can't afford to. If you have a glass of beer and you go on the bridge you may find yourself nodding. You can't afford to nod—not in convoy. Sometimes you sail very close. If you make a turn of 60 degrees then, and you go hard a-port instead of hard a-starboard, you'd be in collision in about two minutes."

February 14th, 1942.

Courage is a subject that crops up in these notes from time to time. Frankly, it fascinates me. The ability of some men—not a high proportion—to be quite selfless, to take awful risks without apparently any thought for whether they live or die is, to me, marvellous. One can be exalted a little by danger; in my own case, I can be so thrilled or taken up by what's happening, so busy trying to observe what goes on, that I can be too busy to be very frightened. Also I can get so tired (and this quickly) that I cease to care so much as I should otherwise care. What gives rise to this speculation is that A. H. G. tells me that Captain Gardner of the Tanks, who has been awarded the V.C., is the man (as I think I described earlier in this diary) who behaved heroically at Capuzzo six months ago, when four out of six tanks ran on to a minefield. On that occasion, he crossed the minefield six times on foot under heavy fire to attend a mortally wounded officer. Had enough detailed evidence been available, he might well have been recommended for the V.C. for that. As it was, he was put in for the D.S.O. and got the M.C. Now he has won the V.C. for work in Tobruk—his feat was told me by Brigadier W. (also in these pages).

A. H. G., a professional soldier four times decorated, has naturally knowledge of bravery. He told me a grim story of a sergeant of his in the last war who was determined to get an enemy sniper; this sniper occupied a tree behind the enemy trench; he was very troublesome. G. told the sergeant he thought his (the sergeant's) notion of crawling into no-man's-land, through the wire, through the enemy trench and to the tree was not feasible; but the sergeant was dogged. In the early hours of the following morning, G.'s batman said: " Here's Sergeant So-and-So, sir—like to see you." G. crawled out of his dug-out into the darkness. The sergeant, coated in mud and filth, said: " I got 'im, sir, an' I've got 'im 'ere." What he had was the sniper's head, severed by an entrenching tool. He had carried out his plan, climbed the tree (the enemy sniper thought it was his relief coming), pulled him down by the legs, stunned him and laboriously chopped off his head—all the time behind the enemy trench. He was a Northumberland Fusilier.

There was an occasion when G., in days when tank commanders had

to go into battle on foot behind their tanks or among their tanks (this was not an order distinguished by wisdom) felt suddenly excessively vulnerable—as he was. And he dodged from shell-hole to shell-hole under the barrage, choosing the newest shell-holes for safety (just, he told me, as Midshipman Easy popped his head into holes made by cannon-balls in the belief that the mathematical law of averages made it unlikely that precisely the same spot would be hit twice). I have practised this trick myself of choosing a new shell-hole, but it doesn't always work by any means. G. told me, too, how one day his tanks were ordered to withdraw up a slope which was under shell-fire. Enemy guns came into action on a hill and it didn't seem possible that any tank waddling slowly up the opposite slope could escape. Anyhow, off they had to go. His tank leader then was a relative of the famous old de Crespigny, who was notoriously a brave man; and G. spent his time as he ascended that slope in counting the shells that dropped among them—he counted twenty-eight and remembers the figure as well as though it were yesterday, and in wondering whether de Crespigny's relative would be as brave as the old man himself. He was—at all events, he showed no sign to the contrary. There was another young man who came out to G. in the old days as a reconnaissance officer, and G. showed him round. They came to a village notoriously open to shell-fire, and G. said: "Here we make a small detour." But the young man wouldn't—he wanted to cross that village, shells or no shells; and he did. G. made his detour and they met at the far side. For a fortnight that young man went around with various people, always behaving in the same devil-may-care fashion, doing risky things others refused to do, so that everybody said: "This is the bravest fellow we know." During all that fortnight he appears to have seen nobody killed. Soon afterwards, an action occurred in which he saw what horrors shells can perpetrate. And his nerve went to pieces—went instantly and apparently irrevocably. What did he lack in the first place, imagination?

What is certain is that it is easier to be courageous when you are fully occupied. Also when you are armed. A war correspondent in Spain was notably what is called "windy." He joined the International Brigade, and before long was distinguished both for leadership (in brains) and for bravery. Asked what had brought about the metamorphosis, he said it was largely a question of carrying arms, and being able to shoot back. Standing about as non-combatant, unarmed, got him down. Some of my colleagues out here feel that they, too, would find it easier to endure enemy fire if they were armed. Personally, I can't say that I feel much different from the last war, when I was always armed.

February 15th, 1942.

I had decided to return to Britain, but (*a*) my newspapers are anxious that I should visit Rangoon and (*b*) I am much attracted by the notion

of seeing India, so I have decided to go off East for a strictly limited stay. I am bound to say that the prospect of fighting in the jungle frightens me considerably. And I should detest being captured by what Jordan calls the " Nipalongs." Jordan is going on the preceding aircraft; I hope to get away on Wednesday.

We did a joint broadcast a day or two ago—I interviewed him on Russia. We got a lot of fun out of it. Before playing it back to us (we had no script and it was mainly impromptu), they had to reverse the records —the noise was as the gabbling of a score of angry perplexed ducks. It was comic to hear the record. I had clearly spent much of my time making approving grunts; I shall hire myself out as a bass viol, for that's what I sounded like.

Jordan gave a cocktail party last night, where I met a young Brigadier of exceedingly radical mind. We talked with great gusto, went on to dinner, and talked some more and finished about midnight. He spoke of the need for selecting promising young officers (or more than promising) and teaching them how to be generals, teaching them military history, and the maxims of the world's great soldiers down history. We talked of the need of some positive programme to invite the world to approve of—merely fighting for our existence isn't enough, much too negative. He looks forward to the day when, if you ask a man what he is, he won't say, " I'm an Englishman " or whatever nationality he is, but he'll say " I'm an airways manager or clerk, or I'm a shipbuilder " or whatever it is, and with him, in his office, will be colleagues white, black or yellow, all working for World Airways or World Shipbuilding or the like. Old-fashioned profits have got to go; it's too pettifogging an idea to inspire fine or great work.

What emerged from my broadcast with Jordan was that he feels the Russians have got something—something in the shape of an *idea* that we haven't yet achieved, and the Russians feel that Russia is theirs, to a degree that the average Englishman doesn't feel that England is his. When they " scorch " the earth or burn down a factory, they feel: " This was mine—now it's going." As the Brigadier said, if he were called on to burn down his house, would he gladly do it, or would he feel that he couldn't rely on the chap across the road burning down his? One may add to that, that certain neighbours, poor or jealous, might not be sorry to see something burned down, since it did not belong to them, anyhow. I said in our joint broadcast (I must say it sounded hectoring and a bit pompous) that until we reach the universal state of mind which says, " There's not the slightest reason why Bill Harris should die for me—and Bill Harris is dying every day in aircraft and the desert and on the seas—unless I'm equally ready to die for him," we shall not have reached that pitch which is necessary in order to win this war. Not only have we not yet reached that pitch, but a vast lot of us would be highly pained at the thought that it is " up to us " to lay down our lives

or even to become mighty poor or uncomfortable. There are those who, without putting it into words, appear to think God has ordained that they should live in luxury while other men and boys die for them. The Middle East is littered with such folk. Far from being badly off or uncomfortable or in danger, they are (so far) enjoying a life and comforts and a holiday atmosphere in almost perpetual sunshine that they would never have enjoyed in peacetime in a thousand years. Now, we are all human; and I enjoy myself like other folk when and where I can. But it's not the way to win this war. The British mind and British life is changing at home; it is changing here hardly at all. And it's got to change. We are not living hard enough, or working hard enough, or trying hard enough. We're not within a hundred miles of that equality of sacrifice that is required to weld us into that unity that is essential to victory.

BOOK 3

INDIA, BURMA, WEST AFRICA

February 18th, 1942.

TO-DAY I BEGAN the flight to India. Up at 4.15 a.m., the streets of Cairo wet and dark and shiny with rain. Cool, too. Might have been a morning in England. I had slept well, yet I was more than half awake when the knock came to my door. What is this mystery which allows us to, or causes us to, wake at the appointed time, uncalled? Napoleon is said to have been able to wake to the minute. More things in heaven and earth, Horatius. . . . Two nights ago, dining with a youngish Brigadier of radical mind, he said he had recently had his fortune told by a native woman (in the Sudan, I think). She told him several things that were, he said, surprisingly true, and then she predicted to him that the war would end this August. He said: "Why do you say that? When that turns out to be wrong, your stock in this neighbourhood will go down." She replied: "But I must say it, because it is true." An Irish Colonel of the Northumberland Fusiliers thereupon told us how once, in Ireland; he dreamt three nights in succession that a friend of his in the Middle East had shot himself. On the fourth morning he got a telegram saying his friend had had a fatal accident; but the truth, as he learnt in London, whither he at once travelled, was as he had dreamed. What is one to make of that?

We flew in the *Carpentaria*, a Quanta Flying Boat from Sydney. What miles she has rushed through the air! Palestine with its purples and greens and grey rocks was lovely. We came down on Tiberius, and bumpy it was, doing so. I have lately met two Jews, both successful men, and both spoiled, so far as I could judge, by their success. Try as I would, I found them both excessively trying. And I was not alone in that regard. There's a sense in which the Jew, like many other folk, is his own worst enemy. He can be like a Wurlitzer organ—no restraint. The German and the Jew—it will need much genius to solve the problems they create.

An American journalist has been describing how he smuggled news from Britain to U.S.A. of heavy damage to one of our cruisers. He knew we wished it kept secret; and his paper, one of America's most respectable, didn't hesitate to print his message. Whom could they imagine they were helping? I doubt if that point occurred to them. There is in

America a kind of pathological condition concerning news. News at any price; make the front page and damn the consequences. It will be interesting to see how the American censors work now they're in the war. It won't be surprising if they are tougher than ours.

I golfed yesterday at Mena, close to the pyramids. Ferguson said that if you drove a ball from the top you'd be hard put to it to clear the base (he meant in the ball's carry). The course is advertised as all grass. Something of hyperbole there. The first hole is mostly dried mud, with wispy grass doing its best. We had good fun, however.

I've been reading James Stephens's *Crock of Gold*. Not for months have I been so entertained by a piece of writing. But there's wisdom there, too. "Curiosity will conquer fear even more than bravery will," he writes. "Hunger, love and curiosity, the three impelling forces of life."

A diplomat on this aircraft thinks the next eight months will be sticky. This is akin to saying it will be dark to-night. A Colonel who has lately passed through Gibraltar and Malta speaks highly of a plan at Gib. for giving the troops three days' rest in rotation. They go to a sort of palace, 300 men at a time, get up when they like, have three cinemas a day, put their feet up, don't need to salute anybody, and so on. Pronounces it a great success. Malta has comparatively few scars to show, he says. Air raid shelters are good, and casualties are few. The diplomat, who knows India, says that when a man got stomach trouble out pig-sticking, he usually took a mixture of chalk and opium.

I've slept half the way to this place (Basra). That's true of most passengers. Are all men short of sleep? We shall be short to-morrow, for we are to rise at 2.30 a.m. More than a joke.

I'm told that the two things Indian soldiers believe in are Queen Victoria and their officers.

February 21st, 1942.

I am writing in New Delhi; as it happens, in the hotel manager's office. Presently they will put a bed up in this room, as they did last night, these most pleasant Indians who speak with a Welsh accent, as though they had been educated at Aberystwyth University. I slept last night as thunder rolled and lightning flashed outside, and rain poured down on those in houses and those, many of the military who cannot find houses, who were in tents. This morning, roads were wet and the air cool and I climbed into a *tonga*, a small tub of a cart, and rolled along

spacious roads to G.H.Q. while at road crossings my driver put his foot down on a gong with a beautiful ring. There's an air about New Delhi —men dine in stiff shirts and women in well-cut gowns, and you could think no war existed. When I asked to see the Deputy C.I.G.S. at H.Q. this morning, they tried his telephone and when no reply was got they said: " Ah, he'll be at prayers." Next, they remembered he'd be at the investiture; and, finally, that he was taking a day off. To-night he is to broadcast at six—a forthright piece, too, telling India that now that Singapore has fallen and Burma is threatened, sporadic bombardments of the shore from the sea, and small landings, and the bombing of north-east India from land-based aircraft in Burma is not at all impossible. A grim outlook. India is faced with the old tale—she has too little equipment, she has lost about three divisions in Singapore, she has too few aircraft, and fewer tanks. Can the Burma Road be kept open ? That is doubtful. But there are one or two alternatives not so good, and a slowing down of supplies to China is probably inevitable. Slowly, the wheel comes full circle, and it is we British who must now look for aid to China —in men. Indeed, the Chinese are already invading Thailand, and perhaps we shall see them in Burma. Chiang Kai-shek and his wife have been here. Whether the Viceroy acted on his own initiative in inviting them or whether the Generalissimo suggested the notion himself, I don't know. Rumour buzzes. Is this visit just what the officials would pretend —a cementing of China and India to fight this war, a seeking of an alternative to the Burma road, an agreement reached as to how and where the best aid to one another can be given ? Or is there more behind it—some coming together of the native leaders of China and India to our despite—I mean the British ? Chiang has seen Jinnah, the Moslem leader, and Nehru, the Hindu, and has spent four hours with Gandhi. Little that is enlightening has been disclosed that is not patent eyewash. I'm told that our military staff and the Generalissimo reached perfect understanding. Let's hope so; we shall need it. His wife met the Indian women here (I don't mean the British women). She told them (it's said) what the women of China are doing in this war, and bluntly asked what they, the Indians, are doing or will do likewise. They answered: " Nothing, till the army of occupation goes " (that's us British). It's not reported what Madame Kai-shek answered to that, but soon afterwards a display of dancing was begun and somebody was asked to stand aside that she might see it. She is said to have replied that she did not wish to see it, that in China they do not dance in these troubled days. If that is not true, it ought to be; for till we change our lives more than somewhat, we shall not win this war.

I am very ignorant of India; this is my first visit; I have thought the subject too vast and complicated to be understood in such small time as I might be able to give it; and I have avoided it. How typical this is of us British ! It seems to me, now, that those Indians who have been loyal to

us are entitled to say: " We have served and trusted you. We expect you to defend us against the other invaders. If you cannot do it, then what becomes of our faith ? " Beyond that, one may ask: " What becomes of India, and of us British in India ? " I doubt if the full implications of Singapore have yet broken through the tough skin of old British India. A lady drily remarked to me over lunch: " We call the aeroplanes by their Christian names; there are so few of them. We recognise a new one if it appears." She added that red tape is thick and plentiful. They wondered if Auchinleck could break through it, and next, if Wavell could. But neither did; they were here too short a time and were too enveloped in business. But it would need pure genius and immense resources and all the luck in the world to triumph over what faces us now. Yet triumph we must, though it will be only after deep suffering and more reverses.

India, seen from the air, is full of grandeur. Near Jawaldi the rocks were reddish-brown and carved by time and the wind till they might have been a cathedral's pillars. Never have I beheld such vast, unpeopled lands—I do not remember seeing one man over untold thousands of square miles. We rose at unearthly hours, one morning at 2.30 a.m. and the next at 3.15 a.m. I had been taking Veganin to stave off a cold. I slept a good deal in the aircraft (about half the flying time), and each time I awoke I had a keen pain behind the left eye.

I found a good deal of banter on India, even among young diplomats and Army colonels. Two of them said: " Ah, you should have come with us to the Club at Karachi—a club for kings only." The other said: " I remember in 1931 being in Delhi on three minutes' notice to be ready to quell rioting. People tried to push you off the pavement, but drew back if you raised your fist to punch." They could laugh at our Blimps, and they could be critical of our rule in India, but also they could see India with cold eyes and behave as old-fashioned British *sahibs*, treating all Indians as decidedly inferior. I can't remember what led to it, but suddenly both were attacking Liddell Hart, mixed with an onslaught on Hore-Belisha. One of them was a gunner; he asserted that Liddell Hart came down to lecture to them some years ago and had the temerity to say you didn't need artillery in a modern army—only tanks. He (my informant) said he got up and challenged this, but " our Brigadier ate out of Hart's hand. He mesmerised them all."

I found Karachi very pleasant. The menservants, in their turbans and white suits, quiet, quick, beautifully efficient, are a pleasure—a keen pleasure after Egypt. We rose in the dark, using a flare-path on the water, and I promptly fell asleep. When I awoke we were at 9,000 feet, with white patches of clouds floating below. It was extremely cold. Half an hour later we landed on the lake at Raj Samand—a piece of dark water two miles long—a cross between Nature's splendour and an ornamental lake. Our next stop was Gwalior and since this is but six

hours by train from New Delhi, on a sudden impulse, I decided to leave the aircraft here. We drove (catching a glimpse of goats on hind legs reaching up to foliage) over rough country, brownish red (a companion said it reminded him of Rio Tinto) and next through the crowded slums of Gwalior—at least, they seemed slums to me, judging by the poverty of people, the host of children, the thin cattle drawing creaking carts, and the tattered or dirty cotton vestments people wore, whence poked their dark skinny legs and overlarge feet. Some of them had daubed spots of colour on their faces—perhaps a red circle of paint in the centre of the forehead, or red juice on their necks. We saw men almost naked, squatting on footpaths washing clothes; and once I caught sight of a woman in gay clothes helping as labourer at a house-building. A beggar sat near the hotel exhibiting the hideous stump of his leg; one at the railway station was blind. We had in our company a Dutch Minister, who began to find a coin, but an English Major acting as his A.D.C. protested, saying: " If you do that, it will be flashed all over India. Others will meet you in Delhi. They will, in some mysterious fashion, single out *you*. I know. I've been here two years and I know." The Dutchman put his coin away.

A youthful Major of Ack-Ack rode with me to Delhi. He's come out to look after a part of this changing situation. He said the morale at home is good, but added: " We need some successes, though." He talked of a group of folk called the British Israelites, who appear to think (he said) that the Pyramids and the Bible between them foretell everything. His version of them is that they say we shall have reverse after reverse till we all begin to pray. He thought they smack of the Fifth Column, and wanted me to look into the matter—said a lot of men high up in the Army belong to the sect, etc., etc. One hears some wild tales.

I see that the *National Herald*, Nehru's paper, is quoted as paying tribute to the fighters at Singapore: " We suspend politics and cherish the romance of their magnificent gallantry "—a bit flowery.

Hindu wants to know what is being done to organise the people of India to safeguard her against the menace that knocks at her door.

A woman guest asked me if I had come from Singapore—she was lately there herself. Her husband, a Civil Servant, joined the gunners at Singapore, and she has no news of him. Her grey eyes were very wide and large. She looked, at a casual glance, quite composed, but underneath she is racked. I talked some empty comfort—advised her to stay here as a likely place for official news. She began to say she was at a certain spot when the Japs came—that they are now looking for her. (She didn't say why.) Then she blurted out: " What's so awful is that it

was all unnecessary—just a piece of bungling." A business man who called to see me said an acquaintance of his has lost seven shops in Singapore and that up to the last there was no realisation of what lay ahead—jollifications and dances went on. He himself went on to describe what a job he and others have had to stop a ball from being held here towards the end of March. He said to them: "How do you know what the position will be at the end of March?" He spoke of bribery and corruption on the railways—150 rupees will get a railway wagon when nothing else will, he said.

I am reminded that I had a sea captain in my room at Cairo, and that he snored all night. Twice I roused him. "Captain!" I yelled at him. He thought he was torpedoed. He swore next morning he hadn't slept from 5 a.m. onwards. But he had—to some tune! I'm now told that if you whistle to a snorer, the sound penetrates his mind enough to stop him snoring, but not enough to wake him up. That bit of lore was capped by another piece—that if you are in a motor-car and a dog runs in front of you, you can scare him back to the pavement by a sibilant hiss made inside the car, which the dog cannot possibly hear! I must try this. Sounds arrant humbug.

I caught sight as my train rode by of two Indian men in the dusk—one sitting crosslegged under an umbrella, the other whirling a long Scottish hammer round his head.

My young Major tells me of a fat bank manager who needs two Sam Brownes to span him—or one whole one and part of another. He's become a Major-General and, in my young friend's view, is proving himself a great soldier.

A Major whose intelligence didn't impress me said the idea behind frankness over India's grim outlook is that if we are to have panic, we'd better have it now. A good many folk have left Calcutta—one figure puts it at 650,000. A danger is that workmen will leave important munition shops, jute factories and so forth. Good propaganda is of the first importance. They've got to be shown how much worse off they're going to be in India, should India succumb to Japan. I'm sure the overwhelming majority would prefer the devil they know to him they don't know.

February 22nd, 1942.

To-night, as darkness fell I walked for some miles along the straight roads of New Delhi—wide roads bordered by trees and with grand spaces all about. As I walked, lamps began to spring into mellow light and then,

suddenly, I found myself at a mighty road rising on my right to a group of noble buildings about which lights had clustered like precious stones. Behind the grey buildings to the left, the sky was lit with a pink and red radiance as the sun set, and, what with green trees, wide lawns, the fine night sky and this magnificent road, the view was superb. This mighty road ran down an incline and far to my left an arch of granite spanned it. I walked up the hill and would have liked to rest, but I saw no seat anywhere. I had been feeling disgruntled, but this walk and this view brought serenity. As I walked back, I passed a small group of Indians sitting on the footpath under trees, warming their hands at a wood fire they had made. One comes across these oddities, or what seem oddities to one's ignorant eyes. This morning, walking round to see the American Consul-general, I passed a boy carrying two panniers made of sacks; he was blowing his cheeks out on a pipe and I wondered for a moment if his sacks held snakes; but there was no sign of them.

This morning I tried again to get into touch with the Deputy C.I.G.S. The officer who tried on my behalf rang up the G.H.Q. office two or three times without success. This was a Sunday. I suggested he should ring the General's house, but this pained him; he couldn't do that, he said, and the General not very well. I said bluntly that there is a war on. This pained him still more. Of course, if the General was really unwell, that's another matter but I was by no means sure I wasn't being fobbed off. This was capped at noon to-day by a message from the telegraph office saying that a despatch I had filed at 7 p.m. last night was lost and could I hand in a duplicate. Ten minutes later, another message arrived saying my despatch had now been found. This was seventeen hours after I filed the message ! I walked over to investigate. An Indian, bearded, turbaned, charming, was apologetic. Mistakes will occur, he said. The despatch was now being sent off.

My hotel bill has twenty columns—such old-world comforts as cork-age, bottles, library, servants' gratuities, accounts transferred from other hotels (!), servants' quarters and dogs all have spaces allotted to them. We're in the Victorian Age here, right enough. Servants in the garden to-day might have stepped out of the life of the old Queen at Balmoral. But their day is gone. Do we know it ? I asked the cashier to add 10 per cent. to my bill for tips. But already I see this was a mistake. The old whiskered retainer who has served my dinner and who speaks little but Hindustani followed me out of the room for his tip. I explained, or tried to, but I'm sure he didn't follow it.

Chang Kai-shek has now issued a long statement which ought to scotch a good many rumours. He points out that China and India comprise one-half of the world's population, and asserts: " To-day

they have not only identical interests, but also the same destiny. For this reason, they are in duty bound to side with the anti-aggression countries and fight shoulder to shoulder in order to secure real peace for the whole world. Moreover, our people have an outstanding virtue in common, the noble spirit of self-sacrifice for the sake of justice and righteousness. It is this traditional spirit which should move them to self-negation for the salvation of mankind." He addresses himself to his brethren, the people of India, saying there is no middle course, no time to await developments—now is the crucial moment. In this new era the people of India should voluntarily bear their share. He cites Japanese barbarism and cruelty and assault on culture and their deliberate opening of opium and other dens to sap vitality, saying that at Nanking in 1937 2,000,000 civilians were massacred in one week. He declares that the people of India should, for the sake of human freedom, give their united support to the Atlantic Charter and join China, Great Britain, America and Russia. Lastly, he hopes and believes Britain, without waiting for any demands on India's part, will as speedily as possible give India real political power. " From an objective point of view, I am of the opinion this would be the wisest policy, which will redound to the credit of the British Empire."

This is a fine statement.

To-night at 11.30, when I slept, a Colonel on the Staff came to apologise, first for my despatch having been lost, and second, for my having been unable to see the Director of Military Intelligence. He was considerably upset at what had happened and at my despatch which mentioned it, and assured me that I could certainly see the D.M.I. to-morrow. I thanked him and said I was afraid it was too late, as I was flying to Calcutta in the early morning.

I was given some interesting figures of India's output in war supplies—some of them admirable, others not so admirable. She is turning out 700,000,000 yards of cotton textiles a year—a lot of it khaki drill. She is producing $3\frac{1}{2}$ million pairs of boots a year. More machine tools are arriving shortly for the manufacture of artillery. (The principal steel works are but one night's journey by train from Calcutta.)

Unhappily, during 1939–40 little or nothing was done in the shape of developing India's munitions industry. She has one of the world's largest steel plants, but, like most of India's factories, it is in north-east India, within bombing range of central Burma.

An amusing story is told of an Italian officer who escaped from a prisoners-of-war camp to spend the night with an Indian woman. A reward of 20 rupees is offered for the recapture of such escapers, and when the Italian had paid her the customary fee, she handed him over

to the authorities and drew a further 20 rupees as reward for doing so. A fanciful mind can foresee circumstances in which a gentleman in this situation might make a business-like arrangement, whereby the Government of India would be made to pay, so to speak, for his night's entertainment.

This has been a lovely day—like June in England; birds flew in and out of the hotel lounge, and on the lawn outside a string orchestra under a striped awning played "Tea for Two" and other English tunes.

In my despatch to-day I emphasized the need for some imaginative political stroke to weld India into a unity (a vast deal easier spoken of than achieved). So far in this war India has been a mixture of supply depot and manufacturing centre. She now faces a situation demanding genius plus dynamic energy. Can we find it? As the *Statesman* rightly says: "Britain is as much dependent on India in this extremity as India on Britain."

February 23rd, 1942.

To-day I flew from New Delhi to Calcutta. The only other passenger was a woman with two small dogs, neither of which, I am bound to say, looked to me worthy of a passage by air, especially as one of them found it impossible to contain himself and misbehaved twice, once on my overcoat. A long drive from Dum-Dum Aerodrome to the Great Eastern Hotel, Calcutta, where I found Philip Jordan of the *News Chronicle*. (Philip had reached New Delhi the evening before my arrival, but, having been refused admission to a certain restaurant because he was wearing battle dress, and being unable to find a room, he had departed swiftly, considerably unimpressed by New Delhi's attitude to the war.) I was in possession of a through ticket on my aircraft to Rangoon and, during the evening, I rang New Delhi trying to persuade them to give Philip the other available seat. My effort, however, not only achieved nothing, but resulted in New Delhi taking me off the aircraft and giving my seat to a representative of the Ministry of Economic Warfare (who, I was not grieved to learn at a later date, never got to Rangoon at all).

Jordan, with his accustomed skill, had himself been moving in the matter of transport, and at 11 p.m. a Wing-Commander of the R.A.F. came to our supper table to say that he could get us on to an aircraft going part of the way to Rangoon at 6.30 a.m. to-morrow. Tropical kit that Philip has ordered has not turned up, but, nevertheless, we're going. We've but one shirt apiece, and one topee between us; but the main thing is to move.

I am told 209 wells have been sunk in Calcutta in case the city is bombed.

February 24th, 1942.

We are now at Chittagong. We had expected to fly in a Valentia, but finally found ourselves aboard an Atalanta. She has no brakes. The small engine for pumping compressed air into the cylinders was not working, so the pumping had to be done by hand, which took about an hour. While all this was going on, Jordan and I got a cup of coffee at the Mess and he went off to try and discover a topee. Suddenly we saw the aircraft was moving with our kit aboard, and we ran for it.

The crew were very good-humoured and made us welcome. The captain is either Scots or Dominions—not sure which. He wore an old felt hat to keep the sun out of his eyes while flying. A good deal of banter between us and another machine before starting, one pilot saying, "We'll come back and pick you up," and a second, "We'll pass you and you'll be going backwards."

We'd rather a job getting down at Chittagong, for the aerodrome is small. There was no food on the aircraft and, as we are to stay the night (the wind was in the wrong direction and we couldn't get off again after refuelling), Jordan and I offered to get some food for us all. We drove in a truck down to the Circuit House, a picturesque place in a park that might have been in Surrey. Calves grazed among the trees. We ran into one or two other R.A.F. pilots, who told us fantastic tales about Rangoon. One said: "Over 150 houses are burning there"; another said: "I bought a hotel for 6*d.*—hot and cold in every bedroom. We exchanged documents over it. Big clocks, ninety-guinea radiograms, small cars, these were being given away." Another said: "I walked into a fine house and found a notice stuck up—'Take what furniture you want and good luck to you. V for Victory.'" I am told of English men and women walking seventy miles from Rangoon on foot, and of Indian refugees toiling along the roads all the way to Calcutta.

The American A.V.Gs. (volunteers) have taken the brunt in Rangoon. They get $300 a week from the Chinese Government, plut $500 for every Japanese aircraft they shoot down. Our R.A.F. pilots tell me that no fierce attack has been made by air since December. The Japanese do not attack as a rule by day—only by moonlight. On the last occasion they attacked by day fifteen of them came and all were shot down. A R.A.F. lad described the A.V.Gs. as desperadoes with two "gats"—one on the leg and one round the waist.

I hear of Japansese two-man submarines being used.

This is a bad moment for the Moslems in India to be dissatisfied, when Japs threaten Rangoon. Moslems form some 60 per cent. or more of the Indian Army.

Just before I left England last year H. G. Wells wrote: "Come back soon. Things will be moving here." They are certainly moving. Marges-

son and Greenwood have gone. Grigg, a Civil Servant, has been made War Secretary. Temple, a Socialist, is now Archbishop of Canterbury.

February 25th, 1942.

The buying of our food was done for us by an extremely able and kindly young officer, who spent £12 10*s.* for us. He has been looking after us like a father, fixing up spare beds and finding us hip baths. As we have no mosquito-nets, I pulled the sheet over my head. I am decidedly bitten, however. We had a first-class dinner in the Mess and ran into some Ack-Ack officers newly arrived from Poona. Their guns, however, won't be here for another seven or fourteen days. They said laughing: " Nothing satirical you've heard about Poona is exaggerated."

There's no defence to a local aerodrome except about a dozen Burmese infantrymen. Our crew have parachutes, but we, naturally enough, have not. The aircraft, so far as I can gather, is to carry evacuees from Burma. Meanwhile, we are taking down one 250-lb. bomb. Our progress, however, is not swift: we have covered 250 miles in twenty-six hours.

One of the crew told me with a grin this morning that they had been using the wrong sort of oil for the air compressor, and, having discovered the right sort, have now got the engine going. We started at 10 a.m., having breakfasted on dry bread, bully and tinned salmon. We turned my sleeping-bag into a food sack, and I must have resembled Father Christmas walking about with the sack flung over my shoulder. Jordan and I have now between us 75 rupees (about £5), plus his American dollars and our traveller's cheques. We don't receive much encouragement to go on. A R.A.F. sergeant said this morning: " No use going on —no food down there. We can't hold Magwe more than 72 hours." A Lysander pilot said: " They told me: ' Get out of Rangoon. Don't care where you go to, but get out.' "

We arrived this lunchtime at Akyab. They showed me with amusement the local paper, with its leading article saying: " European troops more congenial, very nice, and deal fairly by all." The article goes on to say that during an evacuation: " Democracy can be practised extremely." The R.A.F. padre tells me that there's a good deal of Fifth Column activity round here and that some of the natives held a two-days' celebration when the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* were sunk. (This may not be strictly true about the two-days' celebration, and yet I find, occasionally, that there is a sense in which rumours, exaggerated as they are and inaccurate as they are, can give a truer picture of a situation than the strict facts or, at all events, the official facts. This isn't always so, but it is sometimes so.) The R.A.F. here (Akyab) had been informed we were coming and did their best to get us on, with such good effect that by teatime to-day we reached Magwe in a Lockheed. Our kit had

been stowed in a luggage compartment in the very nose of this aircraft—a compartment reached from the outside. When the pilot came to unlock it, he couldn't, and for over an hour wrestled with it in the broiling sun. He had partially to break the lock.

February 26th, 1942.

The situation in South Burma is the gravest possible. At best, our reinforcements are limited and have enormous distances to cover. Their lines of adequate supply won't be easy—just as Malta isn't easy and Tobruk wasn't easy. Events will be ruled to some extent by the price the Japanese are prepared to pay and how urgently they put attack on Burma in their strategic plan, or whether they place Sumatra and Java higher on the list. This afternoon the Japanese raided a Rangoon aerodrome, doing some damage, but losing between ten and twenty aircraft. One lad lying 2 yards from a bomb had his shirt ripped off, but was not hurt; another, 8 yards away, was killed.

As we flew from Chittagong to Akyab to-day over a countryside threaded with winding waterways and high ridges of hills, and again, when we flew over the mountains from Akyab to Magwe (no roads lead out of Akyab), we saw plainly how difficult a military advance in the country of North Burma would be. More likely, perhaps, are coastal landings—and not only in Burma, but near Madras also.

February 27th, 1942.

We are at Rangoon.

Last night we slept in a bungalow in the woods at Magwe. A Flight-Lieutenant, middled-aged, Australian, looked after us, gave us a cold bath and a bed. Neither he, however, nor anybody else, can prevent the mosquitoes attacking us. I had sixteen bites on my right arm yesterday, and I have infinitely more to-day.

We have reduced our kit to the irreducible minimum. Getting on to Rangoon has not been easy. One suggestion was that we should fly down in a Puss Moth, one at a time, but this was ruled out as being (*a*) impossible, and (*b*) likely to make cat's meat of us for any Jap fighter roaming about. A road convoy set off and was brought back. A plane was sent to Mandalay for medical supplies—these indicate uncertainties and needs. We finally got to Rangoon in a D.C.2. At 2 p.m. we were told that flying to Rangoon to-day was impossible—no aircraft were going and, if they were, they were already full, and so forth. Ten minutes later a Wing-Commander entered the room where we were sitting, asking: "Has anybody got any aspirin?" He had a splitting headache. I happened to possess some Veganin tablets. Ten minutes later we were in an aircraft bound for Rangoon! I had been told the

pilot was the spit and image of me, and I had, indeed, been mistaken for him, so I looked at him with attention. He was cadaverous, terribly thin, with a somewhat knobbly nose and grey, wavy hair. Now I know what I look like.

" Don't get killed," said the Australian Flight-Lieutenant (who once sold " hot dogs ") as he showed us into the aircraft. He had a queer look in his eye, as though he thought we were done for. We set off at 2.20 p.m., and at four o'clock were flying over a land of plains and winding rivers—plains dotted with a multitude of burning fires; I could count fourteen of them through one window, sending up white, drifting smoke. Presently the pilot summoned me to the cockpit to look ahead. In the distance was the city of Rangoon. From it arose a thick column of black and yellow smoke, rising 1,000 feet into the air. Beside the column, stood the great Pagoda, with its dome coated with gold leaf, glinting in the afternoon sun. The pilot said in my ear: " The fire has been burning five days—no water to put it out."

We landed at Mingalodon Aerodrome, eleven miles outside the city. We clambered out with our kit, and stood and looked around. Not a soul to be seen. Not a usable aircraft to be seen, except the one that had brought us. Eight or ten machines in various states of being shot-up and burnt-out stood at rakish, collapsed, horrid angles. The aerodrome buildings had been shot-up and fired and little of them remained. " Philip," I said, with a wry smile, " I'm not sure that we shouldn't be wise to get back into the aircraft and depart while we can." However, we had no intention of doing this, and walked over to the ruined buildings to await events. About ten minutes later a Wing-Commander, cheerful and unperturbed, drove up, learned we wanted to go to R.A.F. headquarters and offered to take us. In return, we were glad to be able to give him a tin of fifty cigarettes, cigarettes being short. A few minutes later our D.C.2, having no further business, took its departure.

R.A.F. headquarters were in a group of huts in the town. We fell on them like bolts from the blue, or alternatively, like waifs and strays. These half-dozen R.A.F. officers, under a Group Captain under forty, one Wing-Commander loaned from the Colonial Police Service, one or two others who were civilians when this war began (one an underwriter at Lloyds'), combined efficiency with kindliness, good-nature and courage in as high a degree as you could want. In about five minutes we were having a mug of tea. In about five more minutes we had a shrewd idea that space was to be found for us in a vacated house, and ten minutes after that we were being driven to see General T. H. Hutton, the G.O.C., at his H.Q. in a red-brick building which, unless I am mistaken, had been the University of Rangoon. And General Hutton himself looked as much like a university professor as a general. He sat at a roll-top desk, looked at us over his spectacles and, answering a telephone call from time to time, talked of the military situation. It is grim. Our front

line at the moment is some fifty miles north of Rangoon, roughly astride the famous Burma Road. Our army consists of two weak brigades, of mostly Indian troops, together with a number of tanks—American "Honeys," similar to those used by the 4th Armoured Brigade in the desert offensive in Libya last November. Among the British infantry are two Yorkshire regiments—the Duke of Wellington's (this regiment had the distinction of firing the first shot on the Western Front in this war) and the West Yorks. The General said gravely once or twice, but with the ghost of a twinkle in his eye: "I don't know how much I ought to tell you." We replied—as we always do: "You tell us everything—the Censor will look after that." He said: "Well, what do you want to do?" I said: "We'd like to go up to the front and see the troops." He answered "I don't see why not. When do you want to go?"

"In the morning, if possible."

We left it at that.

I ought to say that at R.A.F. headquarters we found Air Vice-Marshal Stevenson, a placid giant who talked to us with his back to the open window, so that unhappily I missed half he said. I caught, however, that the Japanese aerodrome is but ninety miles from ours and that warning of raids by either side is in consequence almost non-existent. Yesterday we raided them simultaneously with their raiding us, neither of us finding any aircraft on the ground. However, our fighters hovered over their landing fields, awaiting their return. Seldom have aircraft had such a welcome, for we shot down fifteen. Wing-Commander Cary, who two years ago was a sergeant pilot and now wears the D.F.C. with two bars and the D.F.M., shot down three.

February 28th, 1942.

Last night we slept, along with three or four R.A.F. and Army officers, in a fine house that was left in a great hurry by its owner, so that the bookcases are filled with books, golf clubs stand in the corner, walking-sticks are in the hall, an expensive Gillette razor-set and beautiful cuff-links are in the bathroom, and a certain amount of food is in the larder. Electric light, fans, water supply and the Frigidaire are all working; beds have their mosquito-nets, the friendly intimate little articles that a well-kept house possesses lie here and there, and, in short, it's a tragic little picture of the effects of war. Over supper, we heard something of the valour of our men crossing the Sittang River—and something of the humour, too. For example, a British Captain stood on the bank of this river—here 800 yards broad—watching a raft holding three men making a stormy passage over. Shell-fire and mortar fire was dropping in the river, and it seemed that the raft could not possibly survive. The Captain jumped into a canoe and paddled out to the rescue with shots dropping all round him. Once or twice he almost capsized, but

still he struggled on. Then, suddenly, a shell dropped close enough to the raft to overturn it and hurl its three occupants into the river. Imagine the captain's astonishment when those three men at that particular spot were able to stand up, the water up to their shoulders, right the raft, clamber on, and continue their hazardous passage.

Another grimly humorous tale is this: Some days ago (or even longer), 1,500 criminals and 800 lunatics, besides such lepers as there are, gained their liberty in this almost deserted town. A crowd of these lunatics arrived at one end of the bridge across the Sittang River at the moment when Japanese troops reached the other. The Japanese began their customary demonstration of yells and war cries, and exploded their crackers in an attempt to disconcert their enemies, but were almost outdone by the fantastic gesticulations and comic or grotesque behaviour of the lunatics themselves, who appeared to think the Japanese were playing a game with them.

A British Captain said to me: " We took two prisoners the other day: one was a lunatic and the other a criminal who had been serving eighteen months for murdering his wife."

The disorder, the looting, the attacks made by criminals or insurgent Burmese on poor Indian servants, will never be a tenth part known.

This morning we drove into the town, which is virtually deserted: no hotel, bank, restaurant, or shop of any description is open. A good many are broken: a good many are burnt. Not much damage caused by enemy bombs; most of it is due to Burmese or other looters and destroyers, who continue night after night to create fires which we see burning in distant parts of the town. The only people left in Rangoon to-day are clusters of Indian servants, deserted by their masters (a company of Indians are, so to speak, encamped, sitting about making their small fires, in a square in the centre of the town, or setting off in driblets to walk towards India). A few Burmese riflemen in their slouch hats stand about with rifles, and down at the docks a handful of Indian engineers and soldiers are still unloading and assembling motor vehicles for the Army; in a workshop not far off, mechanics belonging to our armoured brigade are at work on vehicles also.

A vast and sinister quietness broods over the city in the hot sun. Roads are empty. Here and there a dead dog lies in the path and, as your car approaches, birds of prey, which have been picking its bones, fly off. The most terrible sight is that of acres of land covered with Lease-Lend motor-cars, trucks and lorries, which were set on fire several days ago to prevent their falling into Japanese hands. I cannot but think this was prematurely done. I am told their worth was £1,000,000. There they are: sometimes piled one on top of the other, three or five deep, burnt, blistered, crumpled, mottled and bearing the very hues of death—straight from the American workshops to the incinerator, a monstrous and horrible sight.

In all Rangoon I haven't seen a single woman.

Sinister as Rangoon is, and queer and strange as the atmosphere enshrouding it is, the city has its portions which are like a garden city; wide stretches of road, fine houses and lovely gardens, so that apart from the tremendous heat you might at times think you were in an English garden city. To our astonishment, by the way, we found two or three telegraphists still working in the Post Office, sending off official messages. As we drove away, we came across a film poster advertising a picture: *Here Comes Mr. Jordan.* This tickled us both. Near the poster were grazing one or two lean kine, made bold by their hunger.

Last night, after Jordan had gone to bed, I searched the house and discovered a Burmese sword and a bayonet. These I carried upstairs, giving Jordan the bayonet and keeping the sword by my bed. If we were attacked in the night, I thought, we'd better have something, at all events, more than our fists.

Over supper we had been informed that a R.A.F. convoy containing the bulk of R.A.F. personnel, would leave Rangoon this morning, and we have been urged to join it, the argument being that at the moment we stand an excellent chance (though by no means a certain one) of withdrawing safely, whereas if we stay we stand an equally excellent chance of being captured or killed. So strongly were these arguments put to us and repeated at breakfast this morning, that we, first of all, decided to take our departure (the other war correspondents withdrew to Mandalay several days ago). However, the more I thought over this decision to leave, the more unhappy in mind I became. " After all," I said, " we haven't been here many minutes, and our job inevitably involves risks." It wasn't difficult to win Philip over, so here we still are.

I haven't yet seen much of the notorious Burma Road—the best-known road in the world to-day, I suppose, but I am credibly told that its verges are littered with broken vehicles—broken owing to their poor quality and recklessness of Oriental drivers. The best-informed here believe the Japanese will make the most determined efforts to conquer Burma. Their ability to transfer an immense air force to this region is obvious. They have got one or two Blenheims they either bought pre-war or have captured from us. On these they've painted our colours, and with these they are doing some bombing of our troops. Easy to see what heartburning this will cause.

The room in which I write these notes has a dozen fowling pieces lying against the wall in various conditions of usefulness, a number of which have been used by R.A.F. officers against looters and marauders in the past few days. When we walked last night to the house where we slept, our two companions shouldered fowling pieces as though we were off to shoot abbits.

Military law was declared some days ago.

Rangoon is credited with the highest murder rate in the world in times of peace.

This note by a Squadron-Leader is worth recording:

"The Japs are good and brave pilots who make their machines do things they were never intended to do. They have only two guns at the front, almost no protective armour, but the machines are very manœuvrable, and if you mix it they can often get you; but a Hurricane can dive through them."

A R.A.F. officer attached to our troops tells me that once or twice he has been compelled to make a swift getaway and has slept on these occasions in paddy fields.

Our hesitancy over staying or departing resulted in our being too late to journey to the Front this morning. About 1 p.m. we ran into General Hutton, who asked us where we were lunching. We had very little idea, so he said: " Come and lunch with me, then." (We are being kindly treated, indeed. Air Vice-Marshal Stevenson, for instance, said this morning that if the worst happened and we are still here he will try to send a Blenheim to pick us up—provided the Blenheim can find us and can get down.)

The General's bungalow overlooks a miniature lake; flowers and blossoms abound; no sound broke the stillness, and the scene was idyllic. Yet we knew that the enemy was in the background. It was as though we were acting a cheerful but unreal scene in a play, knowing that tragedy awaits in the next act. We talked for a long time, speaking of social problems and post-war problems with frankness. He agreed with most that I said. I said, among other things, that Cairo and New Delhi are a million miles removed from the cut-to-the-bone existence in Britain, and an equal distance from the change of mind and the social changes that have occurred in Britain, and are continuing.

He mentioned, in passing, that he got his orders to come to Burma on Christmas Day and began his journey at ten o'clock next morning.

We drove next to see Governor Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith (formerly Minister of Agriculture—in Mr. Lloyd George's opinion one of the best we've had in that office). We found him in a grey shirt and flannel trousers and smoking a pipe—a figure contrasting oddly with his Eastern palace (which bears a resemblance to St. Pancras Railway Station on a small scale and which must be one of the ugliest buildings in the world. This, I gathered, is his own view). He's burly, full of " old buck," as we say in Lancashire, and he's got a glint and a twinkle in his eye. But he spoke of the curious air overhanging the city. He said: " It's like the days following Dunkirk, when you knew something terrific might happen at any moment and you rather wished the fighting and

bombing was near at hand, so that you could grapple with it." He went on: " The millionaire and beggar are equal now in Rangoon, for money can buy nothing." He sees Burma's importance in its true light—described it as our " card of re-entry " in this war. I gather he's had no word at the moment from the Government in London for two days (communications may be difficult) and that we could do with two more divisions of troops. Unless fresh reinforcements in strength can arrive, then " It's curtains," to use one of his blunt phrases. The demolitions are prepared—oil refineries, power-house, dock installations. As he drily said, whenever you decide to " blow them," that decision is sure to be wrong—you'll be too early or you'll be too late. I asked him about ships, in case we have to evacuate by sea. He said, smiling: " Ah ! We've made tender inquiries about that." He's full of fight.

The only sounds as one moves about the roads are the cries of birds.

We had no Intelligence service in Thailand because, I gather, our Foreign Office said: " The Thailand Government wouldn't like it."

Yesterday our tanks drove the Japanese from a position they held north of Pegu. The enemy are striving to force their way through jungle towards the Rangoon-Prome road in order to cut it. In the neighbourhood of Prome, cholera is breaking out.

March 1st, 1942.

We hadn't been long in bed last night when we were roused and asked to move to another house 200 yards distant, so that we should not be split up in the event of being compelled to withdraw hurriedly from the city. I'm afraid I was irritable over this—it seemed a simple matter to call us, if need be. Moreover, I much doubted having to retire from Rangoon so swiftly. It's true that as we ate our supper in the house, bombs began to fall some distance off but few citizens of London would have been disturbed by them. One officer, remarking, " I'm no —— hero," made a hurried exit, bent for the cellar or slit trench, but this, in our view, was caution carried to extremes. However, we had to move, orders being orders. (We are subject to military law when with the forces.) In the removal, a supply of liquor was taken by one individual which, together with some articles that could hardly have been other than looted, occupied space in the available car. Looting is a sort of disease, an infectious disease, which easily spreads, particularly in circumstances wherein it seems certain that anything of value left behind will fall into enemy hands. Yet, once concede that you are justified in taking an article, where are you to stop? Food is one thing, but an article of jewellery or a handbag? A Gillette razor I had seen in the bathroom was a much finer instrument than mine. It had been left behind in a

hurry by, in all likelihood, a fellow countryman. I looked at it and thought: " I suppose a Jap is going to shave himself with that before long." And I left it there.

We carried most of our stuff down the road to the other house and turned in again. This morning we are still here, as I anticipated. Not only that, but a Wing-Commander, as imperturbable as the Rock of Gibraltar, and as ready with his smile as a baby after his bath, made us an early cup of tea. He has found an electric kettle, and he produced tea on a tray—tea from a natty teapot and with shining cups, as though we were at the Savoy. This was the very acme of kindness. Were I a king, I should have much ado not to knight him.

It occurs to me that Jordan and I are moving about Burma in the style of a couple of Shakespearian clowns, earning our keep by entertaining folk. I lose no opportunity, when we meet generals and Staff officers and the like, of saying: " Of course, Jordan is just back from Russia." And Philip lets them know I am from Middle East. An invitation to lunch or tea, so that we may be cross-examined, then follows. But alas ! I am small beer compared with Philip on Russia. He's a diverting companion. His imitation of the Poona-Poona brand of colonel is capital. He has an amusing saying, too: " We will now leave the hall in a body." We don't always see precisely eye to eye. Who could ? He thought it foolish to bring our sack of food, but I have too often known in the Western Desert how precious food can be to agree to abandon it. At borrowing a motor-car or persuading somebody to help us, he is 1,000 per cent. better than me. Indeed, at this sort of thing he is little short of a genius. This morning the Governor rang him up to say that he, the Governor, is leaving Rangoon early to-morrow morning in an armoured car, and that if we care to accompany him, he'll be glad to have us. After some deliberation, we have decided to go, and we moved into the Governor's house during the day. Here we lunched and, during the afternoon, at Dorman-Smith's suggestion, drove into the town to find an Indian doctor to inoculate us against cholera, and in my case, to dose me against diarrhœa, which is beginning. The doctor was middle-aged, placid, charming.

I can now give some account, albeit brief and inadequate, of this jungle fighting in Burma, wherein our troops have fought six or seven weeks with little or no respite. Seldom, if ever, have our men endured a tougher or more arduous campaign. Most of the fighting has been at close quarters—often hand to hand—in jungle where you can't see more than 10 yards and often less. Tentage or bedding doesn't exist. At times our men fought anything from two to six days with little or no food. The Sittang and Salween and Bilin and other rivers had been crossed, sometimes by bridges, sometimes by boats, but often on home-made rafts, or just forded or swum. Our men have been engaged against an

enemy long-trained for jungle warfare (for which our men were not trained at all), and, moreover, an enemy who can live on two handfuls of rice a day; or can easily live on the country. The enemy are usually welcomed by the Burmese people, who, for handsome payment, have provided them with good guides and given them adequate warning of our troops' approach. I'm not excusing our men's retreat. No excuse is needed for they've fought valiantly. Our casualties have never been replaced—that's been impossible—whereas the enemy's have constantly been made up. The enemy's methods are worth noting. The Japs never advance in extended order through the jungle. They prefer to wait in " hull down " positions, motionless and silent. When we close, they open with Tommy-guns, machine guns, crackers, and small bombs, the latter to create confusion, behind which they came to close quarters with swords. They don't encumber themselves with many rifles, but combine immense fire power from light automatics with the use of steel. They use war cries to encourage themselves and to indicate their positions to comrades. Moreover, they employ coloured bullets to indicate their positions and ours. They're adept at sniping and observing from tree-tops and at marking trees or jungle tracks with signs to guide comrades. Their methods of pointing out bombing targets and the co-operation of bombers and infantry appear better than ours. It is plain that their forward command can communicate direct to bombing aircraft to signal targets, as ours cannot do. They've little motor transport, but use pack or wheeled transport. The net result is that they can move through jungle at much greater speed than we. Happily, the fight has proved that our best British or Indian troops, when seasoned, can more than hold their own. But we've got to set about that training and that right equipment. We've been impeded in one battle by our motor transport, but, of course, our motor transport and our tanks, used at the right time, are a great advantage. Our fighter aircraft, too, excel anything they've got here as yet. What's abundantly clear is that the Japs are more skilful and able than we thought. We've looked on jungle warfare as something against assegais or bows and arrows. We find opposed to us a kind of fanatic savagery allied to modern, thought-out technique, a formidable combination. The enemy's tendency to savagery is exampled by the experience of some of our medical personnel, who after capture, had ropes tied round their necks. They were told if we counter-attacked they'd be shot. In fact, they weren't shot and one escaped. As to the toughness of our troops' ordeal, a Brigadier who himself swam the Sittang River, taking fifty minutes to do it and who lay all one night with his Brigade Major inside enemy lines, said to me: " Crossing the Sittang River was possibly worse than Dunkirk, for, as troops swam or got over on rafts, etc., they were subjected to gunfire and dive-bombing. The river seemed full of bobbing heads. The most gallant thing was the fashion in which wounded were got over on improvised rafts from torn-down doors

or logs of wood. I saw one man without any support swimming on his back through currents and eddies drawing behind him a wounded man. Happily, on the other side, no enemy waited and good arrangements for clothing and blankets had been made." He continued: " One moonlight night, we came face to face with the Japanese. Earlier that day I had sent a detachment of men with a local priest to procure food. This priest vanished. I suspected treachery and decided not to camp where I had intended. When we encountered the Jap force, which outnumbered us four to one, we dropped down in silence. We heard them giving orders to bring up mortars, etc., and they proceeded to shell the position we had vacated, while we got away unscathed."

A Brigade Major said to me: " As you advance on the Japs, they've a trick of vanishing in the jungle, but the next minute you hear them using imitation animal or bird cries as signals, and suddenly they reappear, trying to outflank you. But they're poor shots at anything except close range. A good many Burmese are Fifth Columinists, but not all—Kerens, for example, are friendly and do their best to help us, but unfortunately they're rather timid." I asked him about water. He replied that they drew water from wells, pleasant cool water, and have suffered no ill effects so far. I asked about the fate of wounded. He replied that locating them is itself extremely difficult. Indeed, you can begin advancing in jungle, keeping touch with comrades by means of shouts and whistles, yet inside ten minutes you can lose your comrades utterly. Some undergrowth is very dense, but, on the other hand, the jungle has far more cart tracks than you'd imagine.

Paddy fields at present are excessively dry and raise clouds of dust when vehicles pass. Such is the dust that one officer told me: " You'd best let the vehicle ahead have ten minutes' start if you wish to travel in any comfort. Moreover, those fields are completely shadeless. Fighting in the open, however hot, is infinitely more suitable to our men than jungle, for some of our troops had been trained for the Western Desert. Occasionally men suffer in jungle a kind of claustrophobia. In those battles of Kyaikto and Mokpalin and Sittang, our troops were sometimes attacked from the rear and both flanks. At least once the route was so dusty from vehicles and rimmed on both sides by jungle that we became an admirable bombing target. In these jungle battles our losses are inevitably heavy. Besides, men often lost equipment when crossing rivers and were reduced to fighting with no more than rifles. Sufferings at night in jungle when wearing tropical kit need no description from me. Yet casualties inflicted on the enemy have often been heavy."

One misapprehension we had better explode is that the Japs are physiologically incapable of being good airmen.

The Brigade Major said he'd had no letters for three and a half months—and, of course, his men are in similar case. He's been sending

cables costing 25 rupees each (nearly £2), but doesn't even know if the cables were sent. He's expecting to hear that he's a father; so are many of his men. He said that our troops in the beginning equalled in numbers those of the enemy, but, owing to our casualties not being replaced, the enemy are now about two to one. He has been wounded in the leg and was very reserved at first, but slowly warmed up.

I heard a naval officer say to-day: " This is a far, far better thing . . . We're off ! " But he's been as lively as though he were at Cowes.

One of our colonels of infantry swam the Sittang River and had his throat cut by a Burmese as he pulled himself out on the far side.

We have had no guns except mountain artillery—not a real field-piece in the country.

The bridge across the Sittang River was blown by us when some of our troops were on the wrong side. But it must be remembered, in justice, that choosing the right moment to blow a bridge is most difficult. In this instance, I believe no news had been received of those units for several days; the enemy were approaching the bridge with rapidity. Moments of decision whether to blow or not must have been agonising. But, as it proved, crossing the Sittang River on February 21st was a disaster. We have not recovered from it. For three days men crossed that river and many were naked when they reached the far side. The equipment of some units was down almost to nothing.

The doctors around whose necks the Japanese placed ropes included, I'm told, an A.D.M.S. and D.A.D.M.S.

The Governor is an entertaining host. We walked round the golf links he has created—the greens are the smallest I ever saw, and the hazards in the shape of trees and bushes are so tricky that it's hard to imagine how anybody contrives to finish the holes in bogey (many are 3-holes). But he said they do. In one part of the grounds his wife has cut away a portion of foliage so that a superb view of the golden pagoda (Shwe Dagon) springs suddenly on the eye—becomes a cameo.

We chatted about his work. I had seen a pair of riding boots in a bedroom and inquired if his duties compelled him to wear uniform much. He said that on ceremonial occasions he had to wear a thick uniform that was extraordinarily hot, for several hours.

The Burmese, like other folk, are not free from bribery and corruption —maybe they are experts. To one of his Ministers, he once said: " I hear you made a thousand rupees on such and such a piece of public work." The man smiled. " No, Excellency, it was fifteen hundred—but I'll stop it now you've heard of it."

We talked of journalism, too. When he was Minister of Agriculture, he was attacked a good deal in the Press. Quite often an agricultural

correspondent would ring him up in the evening and say: " Look here, I want to tell you—I've got to make an attack on you in the paper to-morrow." Um !

As I've noted earlier, Rangoon has a reputation for murder. During the Governor's term of office, the number of hangings has been 1,500. One murder was committed over a quarrel arising from three matches. The Burmese have a handy weapon that is a farming or horticultural implement in peace—a kind of sickle—which can become a sword in war; with these, murders are often done. The Burmese are also a people easily moved to riot or disorder—Thirrawaddy is notorious for insurgents. But so far (until this war) the Governor's term has been peaceful —no risings. He broke new ground by taking one or two of his Ministers to see the Army.

He has decided to leave—I think wisely—because southern Burma is obviously becoming a battlefield. He will set up a Government in northern Burma, where some of his Ministers are already assembled.

The civilian servants have all gone, and the water supply at Government House grows a little difficult; but we had a capital dinner to-night, cooked by an Army sergeant. We drank a bottle of champagne with our meal—about seven of us were present, the remainder the Governor's " bodyguard "—a number of officers of various units who have gathered round him; one his A.D.C., one an officer of Indian Police, one a ranker officer, genial and tough, another looking mild, but with a penetrating eye. Talk was lively; not often, I daresay, had this bit of pillared and wainscoted hall vanishing at the edges into shadow, heard such assertions and criticisms of the Tories as Jordan and I gave forth (all, I hope, in good humour). But the Governor was equal to it. He has his own views on the Brave New World. One of the officers raised the topic of why the Anglo-Burmese are better stock than Anglo-Indians, arguing that the sires are better, but that, also, their mothers are superior, because Burmese women of quality are not so reluctant to become lovers of Europeans. When Englishmen didn't bring their wives to India, and took wives or mistresses from Indians (he said) we knew India much better. Some of the old Mutiny leaders married Indians and produced fine stock.

From this, for some reason or other, the talk moved to incest. One statement made was this—that if the stock is pure enough, incest—the incest of a son with his mother—improves it. Hereford cattle were cited as an example. Many fine racehorses and dogs (it was said) are bred on incest. So were the Pharaohs ; so is a race of Filipinos who are a head taller than anybody else in their vicinity. But, if the stock is not pure, not fine enough, then incest develops the blemishes and weaknesses.

Our declining birth-rate was attributed by one of our party to our having grown timorous of making women suffer in childbirth, which led

to the instance being quoted (it's authentic) of the grandfather who, at seventy, married a girl of twenty-five, who in due course had a baby. The old gentleman's friends twitted him as to who the father was, and he, in a rage, locked up his wife and had, in all, eight children by her. Another tale was told of the wife of a man who steadily grew richer, but who was close-fisted. She finally said, in a temper, that she wouldn't leave the house again unless she did so behind a pair of horses. But he remained adamant and she got no horses till she left in a hearse !

After supper, we walked in the grounds, being shadowed at a distance by a guard with a tommy-gun. It was moonlight; in the town one or two fires were burning. The evening was still. One or two solitary shots far off; once a distant fire flared up and a crash followed as though a building had collapsed. Previously, the Governor said, the moon has brought Japanese bombers. What was afoot now ? Would anything dramatic happen this night ?

We stood in silence observing the heavens. I asked what defence we had, supposing parachutists fell out of the sky. He said, smiling: " We're wide-open except for these guards." To-morrow at dawn, or before, we are to depart.

" What a humiliation this is ! " His Excellency said as he went off to bed.

The sergeant-cook was asking if he could have a souvenir.

Camp beds had been fixed up for Jordan and me in an office. Having no mosquito nets, we placed the beds under the fans, turned the fans to a high velocity till they hummed like aircraft propellers, and went to bed. But not till 3 a.m. did I sleep. Philip, meanwhile, had risen about 2 a.m. and, unaware that a soldier was sitting with a tommy-gun atop the staircase and the soldier being unaware of our presence, was challenged and didn't know what to say.

March 2nd, 1942.

We drove out of Rangoon this morning. " Like thieves in the night," said our officer companion bitterly.

We were all sick at going.

The Governor's house has been left almost intact—lovely things in it. I tried to pretend we may be back soon, but it may be weary months or longer. Maybe if the division of troops intended for Burma and then diverted to Singapore (that happened to two brigades on the sea, too) had come to Rangoon, we should be sitting tight here. I think we should.

Last night the B.B.C. was optimistically talking about the Japs having been badly shaken at Sittang and not having pulled themselves together yet. This can hardly mislead the enemy—it can but mislead our own people, and strikes me as unfair to our troops here and to our leaders.

After statements of that sort, our people at home will wonder why we've withdrawn or why the Governor has left. In fact, the military have been asking the Governor to leave for the past week.

It was dark as we drove out to " Highland Queen " Aerodrome, and mist overhung the fields. We groped our way, got lost, and caught up other parts of the convoy late. The Governor and General Hutton had gone to the airfield. They were flying up to see General Wavell at Magwe (the General who, as somebody said to me, has in his military command " liabilities but no assets "). Jordan and I hurried to the airfield perched on top of a " jeep "—a small, open, American car something akin to a tiny ammunition truck; they'll be a feature of life postwar, I think. The aircraft was still there—too much mist to take-off. Yes, there was room for us, so presently we all climbed in—the Governor sat down beside the pilot, General Hutton, Jordan and I sat on the floor. We three settled down to read—the General became intent on a volume of *New Writing* (Penguin).

The rest of the convoy travelled by road. We had journeyed up a piece of the notorious Burma Road, till it forked—the right to Pegu (our front line) and we to the left. Our troops were stationed at vital points; the other figures were those of Indians trudging north with their meagre possessions; sometimes a child a yard high carried a bundle. Occasionally one saw a Buddhist priest in his brilliant saffron robe walking along. (I'm told that anybody can become a Buddhist priest at any moment—you walk into the temple and announce your intention. It's suggested to me that a malefactor might do this and avoid punishment for his sins. Sounds improbable.)

It is the civilian staffs of firms who'll carry out most of the demolitions at Rangoon, if and when they occur. Stories are told of the indifferent behaviour of a percentage of the British people here (much as one hears that at Singapore an artificial and somewhat hectic life was being lived until the last moment, and that when the first air raid occurred no blackout was in operation), but it's good to be able to record that heads of some firms and members of staffs are to stay on to the end. Experts will direct the explosions, of course. One expert is here who went to Russia to prepare demolitions, but happily, his skill was not needed there. He's Yorkshire, forthright, first-rate.

It's amusing how, in war, we idealise our allies. Most of us think of the Chinese as simple, faithful, most honest, gentle and kindly folk. They aren't always. Similarly, Russia begins to be pictured as a land of freedom and liberty—which is rubbish. The Russians and Chinese have great qualities and without them I don't know precisely where we should be; but we needn't be childish about them; we'd better see them as they are.

Our radio operator on the aircraft is a lad from Durham—he had

carried out thirty-seven raids over Germany and Italy before volunteering to come to the Far East. Formerly he was a L.N.E. Railway fireman —a fine, imperturbable soul.

The Japanese, in the best Axis fashion, make fantastic claims. One day, when we shot down seven bombers, they declared that one or two aircraft had run into electrical storms.

I hear that at Hong Kong they made one of our generals carry his own bedding.

The Japanese hand-grenade is described as " mostly noise—then it burns on and, in its light, they fire tommy-guns."

Note on demolitions—that the heat in the oil refinery is 140 degrees and that at 150 degrees the detonators explode. Demolition is a five-hours' job; I presume this is after long preparation.

The enemy appear to have begun their next advance. Their readily available reinforcements are placed at 70,000 men. Fortunately, the Chinese have entered Burma, their title, " Chinese Expeditionary Force," and one of their purposes that of liberators. I gather that the A.B.C.D. organisation, which General Wavell headed with a staff drawn from various nations and a consequent need for issuing orders in some sixteen languages, has been abandoned.

Wavell wore no topee, but an ordinary military cap (so also did General Hutton) when we talked with him this afternoon on the air-field, in the brilliant sun. He carries his immense responsibilities with immense calm; said he didn't know very much about the situation in Burma and was going down to Rangoon to look round for himself. He'll fight on if he can. He was perfectly quiet and entirely without fuss of any sort. We talked for a moment about Russia and the Middle East. On Russia, he said their Army had always been well-disciplined; he remembered seeing, several years back, 1,000 Russian tanks roll by a saluting base without a breakdown. Of the Middle East, he said our present leaders there have found, as he himself found, that the great bulge beyond Derna and before you reach Benghazi is almost impossible to hold.

A few minutes after our talk finished, Generals Wavell and Hutton flew back to Rangoon. One wonders how far any men bear what is called a charmed life. Wavell must have been in danger of death a thousand times. No man flies in aircraft over battlefields (nor over Burma to-day) at all certain that he will come down again in one piece. Yet Wavell has returned to Rangoon as though he were off to Ascot or Edinburgh in peacetime. Courage and a high sense of duty—to see this in action is to glimpse promise of a future world infinitely better than this.

A sidelight on the strangeness of this war sprang from a Wing-Commander's words. He said that he and his men, when bombing, seldom see the enemy or, indeed, any war at all. They are virtually never attacked by enemy fighters nor does Ack-Ack rise to them, other than a few rifle shots. Occasionally, he sees a few British troops or a British tank or two.

A R.A.F. officer looking after movements told me how they had spent one and a half hours putting two wounded officers in an aircraft. They screamed with the pain involved. Just after they were in, a doctor wanted to take them out again. My informant said: " I took a poor view of that and I whistled the 'plane off. And off they went."

A frank talk was given me by an officer gunner (R.A.F.) who began by saying: " You can never write the truth, can you ? " I said the truth wasn't always advisable, for security or morale reasons, but we did our best. I was impressed by his sincerity and his own good morale. He was disgruntled because, in his view, some men take the war too lightly. " If they get the kite shot-up, they're eager to say to the C.O.: ' This is a main spar—won't fly now, sir.' They're very casual—never carry food and water in the kite. A pilot will take his helmet off, forgetting that that makes inter-communication impossible. We've piled up Blenheims all over Burma owing to damned casualness. Over £500 worth of kit has been spoilt or looted here and on the road to Lashio. The first three questions some men ask when they get anywhere are: (1) What's the whisky like here ? (2) Any bits of fluff about ? (3) We're not going to do any work, are we ?

" Reasons for all this ? The chaps want to go home. Some of them don't really seem to understand what the war is all about. Promotion has been too swift, and what won the Battle of Britain isn't necessarily the quality you want for organisation to-day." He added: " If there was half as much drinking and twice as much thinking, we should be getting on a lot better."

A Wing-Commander of bombers said to me: " It sometimes takes five hours to get on to a target. We're using codes and code-names that have been abandoned in other theatres of war. Three bombers go off on a target and then, three hours later, three others are sent off. This isn't any good—too slow, and too little weight."

But these growls must be looked at in right proportion—a lot of magnificent work is being done, and most of our men are grand.

March 3rd, 1942.

Yesterday I had 119 mosquito bites—thirty-five on my right foot alone. I went to ask the medical officer if he could give me some

ointment. He applied hot fomentations to my arms, and gave me mosquito grease also. Thereafter he came to show us how better to fix up our mosquito nets. (We are sleeping on a balcony at Magwe Officers' Mess.)

A high officer told us to-day that a fresh brigade of troops has landed at Rangoon. I put it to him that South Burma must be lost to us in a few days or a week. He replied by saying we could do with five divisions.

A Wing-Commander who's been exploring the road to the north said he had been compelled to drive over the dead bodies of refugees lying in the road. (These are poor Indians fleeing from the Japanese.)

We have decided to return to Rangoon. Sources of information at Magwe are small. Moreover, our curiosity is keen. But I confess Jordan is more eager to return than I am. We're both well aware of the risks. It is only two days ago that we crept out, so to speak, at dead of night. I should kick myself if we were captured. But we're going, when we can get the R.A.F. to take us. Were it not for them, we should get nowhere.

The tincture of poison those 119 mosquitos have pumped into me makes me feel rather under the weather. One lies awake rubbing the darned swellings. Very hot and humid. The Irrawaddy rolls sleepily by in the distance. One begins to count the hours during the afternoon till evening bath-time (about 5.30 or 6), with a long drink of thin whisky and water to follow. An officer who has been most generous in looking after us says he has drunk a bottle of whisky a day for the past twenty years.

A cipher officer complained to me of his office being choked with messages. " Important messages are held up because of the rule ' Cipher everything.' There's nobody to decide what matters and what doesn't. They all play for safety and say, ' Send it in cipher.' "

March 4th, 1942.

We're back at Rangoon—flew back to-day. At " Highland Queen " Aerodrome, I ran into a medical officer—a fine man from a London hospital who was a pilot in the last war. He landed here against orders—his shipload of companions was sent away. He was determined to come ashore. He's a godsend, for he's scrounged a water-cart and medical stores, made the lads dig latrines and is preventing them being, as he said, " bombed by flies—just as bad as being shot-up by Japs."

I sat in the hot tent—it was a nice point whether it was hotter outside than in. An Army officer was describing how some of the troops found the jungle excessively trying, and how a number of the Duke of Welling-

ton's Regiment have been hit in a bombing by the R.A.F.—this, he said, was the worst bombing they had ever had. (Could this have been by a Blenheim or two flown by Japs ?)

Sweeps of twenty and forty enemy fighters are coming over nowadays. The R.A.F. has very slender numbers to meet them with.

March 5th, 1942.

To-day we set off by car to drive from Rangoon to the Front at Pegu. I carried a rifle between my legs, for the road between Legu (the first stage) and Pegu is reported to have been cut by Japanese. Telephoning in Rangoon grows increasingly difficult; there's so much interference on the line—probably Fifth Columnists at work—that it's hard to tell what anybody says.

At Legu we came to a temporary halt, which proved to be a final halt. News about the road being cut north of this village is true. It was so hot that it was uncomfortable to walk about. We saw Major-General Cowans, who smoked a cheroot and talked frankly about difficulties in finding the enemy. " We are like blind men putting out our fingers hoping to touch something." He had to leave us to go into conference—it proved to be a conference with General H. R. L. Alexander (who has arrived to take over supreme command in Burma), General Hutton, and Air Vice-Marshal Stevenson.

Four or five officers were eating lunch under a hut raised on stilts, and we were invited to join them. This question of joining in a repast when rations may be short is a difficult one, and we contented ourselves with bully and bread. After that, we spent half an hour with an Intelligence officer who showed us dispositions on the map. He pointed out first, that the map was dated 1931—none later available, and that inaccuracies exist regarding water courses, etc. The enemy are infiltrating westwards 600 strong at Tandavzy, twenty-five miles north-west of Pegu; others are at Intagaw, fifteen miles south-west of Pegu. A number of them are now at Shanuwazi, three miles north-east of Pegu. Thus they invest Pegu on three sides, for between Legu and Pegu the road has intermittently been cut; two of our vehicles have been shot up. Payagi, which the enemy hold, was attacked by fourteen British tanks last night; sixty enemy killed or wounded and the village left burning. We destroyed a 75-mm. gun and a mortar. It's been reported that the Japs also have tanks, but a humorist now suggests they were elephants with their trunks stuck out! At all events, the enemy have anti-tank guns—four per Jap regiment of three battalions. Two or three British tanks have been struck by 75-mm. shells fired from those guns.

An important development is the creation by the Japs of a " Free Burmese Army "—on February 27th at Tazun we found documents showing that the enemy had enlisted Burmese, given them rifles and

grenades and designed for them a flag. Jap words of command have been translated into Burmese. How considerable this force is, it's hard to say; it's primary purpose is thought to be that of extending looting and disorder.

A second report, so far unconfirmed, is of seventy small Japanese tanks proceeding along the road from Pyinton and Taiki, Pyinton being twenty miles north of Pegu and the road running roughly westwards.

No roads are markedly safe; it becomes usual to employ convoys, as we do at sea.

Winston has cabled, I gather, " Fight on ! " A pity he didn't send some of the reinforcements that were lost in Singapore. But it must have been a most difficult decision to make, especially when Singapore had been for so long described as our bastion in the Far East and looked on by many folk as impregnable. The boomerang effects of ill-advised propaganda can be devastating.

Major-General Cowans, when we saw him later, said he couldn't allow us to go up to Pegu—unsafe without escort, and none can be spared. I had been sitting on a valise under a hut veranda, having formed a society (of which I am President and all the members) for the conservation of Hodson's energy. Not very much of it sometimes. Thereafter we drove back to Rangoon, our driver a Captain of Ghurkas who has lost all his kit except a shirt, pair of shorts and canvas shoes and topee. He hasn't bathed for three weeks—was among the 2,000 who crossed the Sittang River. " Most of us," he said " were naked when we got across. We then walked six miles, pushing a railway truck on which we had placed wounded. The strange thing was that for two hours after the Sittang River bridge had been blown up, an awful silence fell. No shooting. Then, after a two-hours' break, shelling and mortar-fire began again. Another strange thing was that I marched my men through a village beyond Sittang and not a shot was fired at us. An hour afterwards another battalion of Ghurkas was violently attacked." He said that his Ghurkas understood jungle fighting and liked it. His lads were mostly boys of seventeen to nineteen years of age, and for five days they fought on one biscuit a day. The Japanese, he said, do all their fighting by night, keeping touch by firing rose-coloured tracers. They next put down heavy mortar-fire (their 4-inch mortars are accurate), follow that by light automatic fire, and then charge with swords. Despite the enemy skill, he thought his Ghurka lads proved themselves better men.

We invited him to " our house "—a large, fine empty house in a Rangoon road that, were it not for the heat, etc., might be southern England—and here he had a bath, and we were able to give him

a whisky and water. It was fine to be able to play the host for a change.

I see chalked on vehicles—" To Blighty via Berlin-Tokio." A looted and abandoned house bears a notice, " To let." On the body of a car minus chassis, the word " Unserviceable " has been chalked. No stifling our lads' dry humour. The Indian troops are impressive. Some smile cheerfully; others are impassive. All look dogged. Difficult to see them and remain unstirred.

A R.A.F. officer who was at the Sittang bridge gives me his view that a good deal of transport could have crossed the bridge the evening before it was blown, but a high Army officer said, " No." He must have a bridgehead created before anything went over. This, in the R.A.F. officer's view, was a case of following rigid staff college ideas—unwisely, in his opinion.

A British forestry official, who has worked for twenty years in Burma, speaking of the Burmese, said to me: " They're just wild, untamed children who came down from Tibet only 1,000 years ago and have been ruined by the rich lands." He described the Kerens, who, among the Burmese, have been friendly to us, as secretive.

March 6th, 1942.

A few bombs dropped last night and we heard booms that sounded like naval coastal batteries firing down the twisting, winding channel not far from Rangoon. As one lies awake at night in a house in Windermere Gardens, a car suddenly roars down the road, or a door bangs, and you wonder: " Hullo ! Something up ? Has the enemy arrived at last ? "—then drop asleep.

" You're very faithful," said General Hutton with a smile when we ran into him to-day. We had called to see General Alexander at G.H.Q. It had been a stirring morning. We had been driven, for want of something better to do and having no transport of our own, to " Highland Queen " Aerodrome. Rumour—and rumours have a trick of proving correct—said that the Japs were already within ten miles of the road up which we journeyed. We kept a sharp look-out, I with the Wing-Commander's revolver in my fist. Nothing occurred. When, however, we gained the road at the edge of the airfield, somebody said: " Hullo, there's a Lysander ! " An aircraft with its wheels down was over the airfield. The next moment we saw that it was not a Lysander, but a Japanese fighter; and a moment after that, we saw there were eight of them, all cavorting about very low, wheels down (they were fixed wheels) busy shooting up the airfield and our aircraft on it. Machine-guns were rattling—Jap machine-guns. We stopped the car, clambered out, your humble servant feeling he was half an hour behind the rest, and we lay

down under a tree wishing the trunk was even thicker than it was. For ten or fifteen minutes the enemy aircraft waltzed about, shooting-up our machines on the ground—three or four fighters so far as I could see, and three or four Blenheims. I heard no shots fired at them by us; none of our machines took off—it would, of course, have been hazardous to do it—the enemy had arrived overhead without any warning of any sort. All the same, I felt the enemy had it far too much their own way. They were so low, and comparatively slow, that some good rifle shooting might have accounted for one or two. (Half an hour later I saw a dozen Burmese riflemen sitting in a wood close by.) We drove over to the control tent. Orders were being received to shift the aircraft to another landing-field. One or two individuals were excited to a degree greater than one could have wished.

The Jap shooting had been poor; only one aircraft was unserviceable.

We drove away, depressed.

We again kept a close eye on the woods through which we drove thirty miles back to Rangoon; but again nothing. Arrived back at air headquarters, however, we learnt that they were, at last, going to withdraw to Zigon, a hundred miles or so up the road towards Magwe. This was wise. With no warning possible of the approach of enemy aircraft, and now that our landing-fields near Rangoon were known, no aircraft on the ground could be regarded as secure. They hoped to fly Jordan and me out in a Blenheim. But no excitement here. The Group Captain and his men were as full of fun and as cool as ever.

After lunch we went to see General Alexander. His reputation as a fighter (to him Gort had handed over at Dunkirk to stay on to the end—Gort had been ordered to do that) led me to expect a ruddy-faced, vivacious man, bubbling over. I was wrong. He was extremely quiet, looked older than I expected, had little to say. What, indeed, was there to say? He had arrived by air thirty-six hours before, to face a position already hopeless so far as holding on to Rangoon went. He showed us his large map on which red arrows pointed to where the Japanese are, arrows showing how fast they are striking towards the road down which we drove this morning. I inquired if he knew their strength. He replied by saying, drily, that there are two divisions of them knocking about somewhere.

Not long after we left him, he drove up to the Front with General Hutton. A couple of hours later, we saw them returning. I think it's correct to say that during that drive he concluded that Rangoon must be abandoned. It's true that a fresh brigade of Indian troops had arrived, together with several hundred mules. But this force was utterly insufficient to provide the added strength required. I believe it's also true that Mr. Churchill had said five divisions were coming to Burma, but, clearly, their coming would take time. Troops across the seas seldom arrest an enemy on the move.

Too little, too late, can be written against the name of Burma, as of some other names grown famous in this war.

As we were leaving G.H.Q. an odd valise or two were being brought in. It looked as if the Army would not be long, or far, behind us. A General on the Staff, learning that we were departing, expressed his relief. " I've been wondering how we should fit you in," he said, " for we're stretched like a piece of elastic "—he meant, fit us into the Army's withdrawal arrangements. We said " Good-bye," feeling, as one always feels, sorry to be going.

We got back to Air H.Q. to find that leaving by aircraft was out of the question. Only one Blenheim was available, and that was wanted for folk more important than us. We were asked if we were willing to ride out in convoy—up the road that, seven hours before, was but ten miles ahead of the enemy. We said " Certainly," but when the young Army officer who was to journey in the car immediately ahead of us declared that, in his view, we should probably be captured, since the enemy would be in strength, whereas we had but a few small arms with us, I began to doubt our wisdom. The young officer wanted to know what our position was if captured; he had a tommy-gun, a revolver and three fowling pieces. Would we like a fowling-piece or two ? We pondered the question of staying, in the expectation of being picked up by an aircraft next day or next day but one. It was a tough decision; we were our own masters. To be captured by the Japanese was the least enviable adventure in the world, especially with our status so ill-defined. Captured with arms, we were liable to execution as *franc-tireurs*. To journey unarmed might be to be shot out of hand, and defenceless. However, if the chance of capture was really excellent, we had better, I thought, be unarmed; if the car ahead became heavily engaged, we might possibly be able to retire. Technically, and internationally, we were non-combatants.

Thus we set off, Philip driving an old Dodge car owned by one of the R.A.F. officers. We were warned to go easy round corners, as she was heavily loaded with petrol; and not to exceed forty-five miles an hour. It was about five o'clock in the afternoon. We had overlooked, in declining the fowling pieces, that we had between us a diminutive automatic revolver loaned to us some days earlier by the former Colonial police-man. Whether it would fire was another matter, or hit anything if it fired.

We drove on without mishap, up the Burma Road, forked left some twenty miles out of the town, and took the road to Prome. We passed, in the earlier stages, a number of our troops in the woods on our left and presently a procession of British tanks began to meet us, coming south from Thirrawaddy—something between a dozen and twenty. Thirrawaddy has the reputation of being the home of insurgents and it struck me the tanks might have been better employed there, since it

looked probable that our troops would all retreat up this road in the near future. However . . .

We kept bowling steadily along through this picturesque countryside, past villages with their flimsy, rickety-looking brown houses raised on stilts, past Burmese men and women, some of whom wore a green or maroon shirt or trousers (and an occasional man with a topee painted gold or silver); past infrequent pagodas with their domes of gold, their pillars of pale pastel blue and their crouched dragons (or whatever they are). Those that had lost their pristine youth and paint reminded you of a piece of the old White City a year or two after the Exhibition. Nobody fired at us; we were eyed curiously, possibly balefully now and then; hard to say. We took a drink of water from time to time from an Air Force thermos flask that had come our way, we ate a few bulls' eyes (we had carried these for over a week), we smoked a cigarette; and we wondered whether anything we had written during the past ten days had reached London. I began to count the bridges. They were numerous—a few strongly built of metal or stone, others, many others, of wood. A demolition party working its way along might easily render the road, it seemed, impassable. I must have counted twenty or thirty bridges, or more, before darkness fell. We caught up with a convoy of heavy lorries and behind these we trailed along at twenty miles an hour. Exasperating. But, at length, the lorries paused; the car armed with fowling pieces shot by them and we after it. Off the car streaked into the night, its small red light running and swinging about like a dancing firefly. We had asked them to keep down to forty-five miles an hour, but they forgot all about that. We hoped they were on the right road, for we had swung off to the right and Jordan reminded me of the Burmese proclivity for turning their signposts in the wrong direction—a fine suspicion to have in your head on an occasion like this.

We were bound for Zigon, for a landing-field still unfinished, and you may be sure we made solicitous inquiries for it. Zigon was a wandering place. At one or two houses, to folk who understood nothing of what we said, our young Army officer imitated the swoops and sounds of aircraft —had they seen anything like that in the neighbourhood? Our pantomime delighted them. Two or three men led the way into the blackness and pointed across a rough field. We ventured on, bumping over the mounds and grass. After some time, by the grace of God, we found one or two aircraft guarded by Burmese riflemen, whose speech was incomprehensible to us, and ours to them. (One day in New Delhi I had rung up G.H.Q., but the answering voice understood no English.) We shouted into the night. No response. No flicker of light. We bumped along to and fro. My companions favoured continuing the search in this and neighbouring fields, but I argued that it was a trifle unreasonable for the Group Captain who had flown hither in his Blenheim to expect anybody to find him in pitch blackness and in this wilderness. He would

be, were he sensible, somewhere along the main road which we had left half an hour before. We were very tired, and a bit irritable and it took us some time to agree on this course; but on that road we duly found the Group Captain waiting. The remainder of the convoy turned up and in next to no time, the R.A.F. lads had one or two fires going. One was lit beneath a grand old tree towering into the night; as the flames rose they shed light and radiance on the foliage till the leaves shone red and gold and brown, a sight to behold. Jordan lay down in the field near the car and within a few minutes was sleeping like a child. (He'd had all the work of driving the car.) I roamed about, making tender inquiries about tea. On that task, the lads under the tree were busy. So I lay down too, emptying the food from the sleeping bag (we bore some of those tins back to Calcutta) and dozed, with one eye open like an old sheep-dog watching for the moment when the tea would be ready. Presently, I got up, took our two enamel mugs and walked over. I doubted I should get them both filled, but the lads were charming. I walked back and looked at Philip. He was deep in sleep. Ought I to rouse him ? I woke him and he sat up—to find his trousers full of ants. This and the tea woke him with a vengeance. I sat holding the precious liquid, sipping it very slowly, making it last a long time. Then I, too, slept well, under the sky, hoping the mosquitoes would be charitable.

March 7th, 1942.

This morning we set off again, a solitary car, for our companions were remaining at Zigon. We were bound for Magwe, to write a despatch. We began the journey before the day was too hot, and the drive had something of a picnic quality. Thus does war run from danger to enjoyment. During the morning we picked up a Yorkshire soldier; in Prome it was. He had come by train from Rangoon, and stood on the footpath waiting for a lift. He was waiting as coolly as though he were on the Great North Road, and seemed no more surprised that we could take him aboard and on his way than if we were one of scores of similar cars going north. He had been ill with fever; he had no food and was bound for Mandalay. He was a simple soul, as much at home in Burma as a Polar bear. He had been drinking water drawn from a pump or well in Prome—Prome, where cholera was present; he had a large canvas bottle of this water with him and we hung it on the outside of the car in the wind to keep it cool (not that we ourselves had any intention of sampling it). We bought a bunch of tiny bananas which proved far less delectable than they looked, woolly and tasteless stuff. On these and a biscuit or two we lunched during a ten-minute halt. Then we pushed on. It was an hour or two later that we got a puncture and began a hunt for tools. We found a flimsy jack, but no brace. We lifted the car with a struggle and there she stood poised like a ship in dry dock—and we sat

in the sun and hoped for the best. One military car passed and ignored us. After a while a lorry drew up and out of it jumped three or four men wearing no recognisable uniform, and with faces that might have been, to my ignorant eyes, as easily Japanese as Chinese. For a second, I thought our adventure had come to an untimely end. But they were Chinamen, full of beans; they announced that we were all brothers now, and they proceeded to take off our punctured wheel and fix on our spare one in several shakes of a lamb's tail. They declined any payment, but, unbidden, drank all the water from our Thermos; there hadn't been much. But we didn't complain of that; they were welcome to the lot. We had not much farther to go—some forty miles or so. This was well; first, because in clambering under the car we had found the petrol tank contained at least three punctures through which petrol was streaming; and second, that Philip had a touch of sun and was now unfit to drive. I took the wheel. I should be no good at Brooklands and I had never seen a Dodge before. However, we trundled along right enough, once or twice dashing through rivulets that crossed the road, occasionally making a dart at a narrow wooden bridge, but reaching Magwe in one piece. Here we turned over our Yorkshire soldier to the Camp Commandant's office.

This was the day on which the demolitions at Rangoon were blown. The time was two o'clock in the afternoon. At the oil refinery at Syriam the column of smoke rose 3,000 feet, and the flames 500 feet. The air was still, and for some while the column of smoke went straight up. Afterwards, the smoke dispersed and descended enveloping all Syriam. The leader of the demolition party, my acquaintance from Leeds, whom I saw later in Calcutta, said to me: " It was awe-inspiring all right. We had fired about 300,000 tons of oil, including 80,000 tons of oil for the Navy; altogether there were 750,000,000 gallons. The oil and machinery together must have been worth millions.

" No. The Japs didn't interfere. As a matter of fact, I saw no enemy that side of the river. Other explosions kept occurring with a dull sort of roar as the fires burnt. Those fires must have burned for several days. I nearly got trapped. I came across some barrels of lubricating oil and I started with a screwdriver—the only tool I'd got just then—to pierce them and next, with sacks of wax lying handy, to set them on fire. But lubricating oil doesn't easily burn and I had to take pieces of rag, including parts of my own clothes and, by first getting that ablaze, gradually make the oil burn. Meanwhile, another group of chaps had fired other material on the end of the quay, and I was nearly cut off. However, we all got away safely. Three shiploads left with us. My own ship held about 1,100 people, including oil company officials, a doctor, a group of Burmese nurses and a lot of soldiers from Indian regiments. At the refineries about 200 people in all had remained to the end.

While we were busy blowing up the refinery—we had already dismantled pumps and thrown parts into the river—other groups were demolishing the power-house and dock installations." He hadn't taken his clothes off for six days when I met him.

I remembered a phrase the Governor used: "The work of centuries will go."

March 8th, 1942.

This morning we went to Magwe airfield to try to get on to Calcutta. One or two other travellers who journeyed up the Prome road after us have arrived; they report some demonstrations against them, and a few shots.

The Japanese are credited with possessing 108 divisions, of which they have, so far, used only sixty-seven. This, of course, is in all theatres of war. We ourselves have not had even two divisions in Burma. Our difficulties in reinforcing our troops and keeping them well supplied are going to be severe. And they have yet to journey—and perhaps fight their way—up this road to Prome.

We were lucky—given places along with a dozen Indian airmen (ground staff) in a Flying Fortress flown by Americans. The Americans have a happy note about them, a kind of casual efficiency much like that of our own flying men. " All the crap in now ? " they say, meaning all the baggage. " O.K. Let's go." (So the films are authentic sometimes.) They have comical little twisted peaks to their caps, and they were full of fun. The radio-man fell asleep and they tied him to his chair.

I had a talk to a sergeant. I said: " When we've enough of these Fortresses we'll be able to blow the Japs off the seas." He grinned. He said: " There's going to be enough all right. We took this from the works in January—they're turning out about two and a half a day there. Enough o' these and they'll look after our Fleet."

I said: " Enough of these and you won't need any Fleet."

He said: " If they give us a base at Vladivostock, we'll see the end of Tokio. But we ain't got a base there yet. Say, those Japs are getting a long ways from home. Cut their supplies, and they're finished."

I asked him how long it's going to take them to polish off the Japs. He thought one and a half to two years. America is turning out aircraft faster than crews.

The interior of this aircraft was the most beautifully finished I had ever seen; built as though for the drawing-room.

Munitions must be good; but they mustn't be so good that you don't make enough of them.

During most of the flight I read *Hamlet.*

We came down at a landing field about 100 miles from Calcutta and

took train to the city. How different is my journey from that of poor Indians toiling along as refugees—humanity writing its story of sorrow in the dust of roads.

March 9th, 1942.

We inquired at the Calcutta Telegraphs office for news of our despatches from Burma—had they gone through, and had they been much censored and in what fashion? The official answer was: " After your messages have been handed over the counter here, they cease to be your property, and we could not possibly tell you what's become of them or to what extent censored or why." We blew up over this and wired General Wavell, asking him to institute the system that prevails in Middle East. (Two or three days later two officials were sent from New Delhi to see us, very pleasant and I've no doubt efficient. But one began by saying: " You must remember India is organised for peace.")

I'm told that only some fifty out of 500 members of Calcutta Stock Exchange remain; the others have evacuated.

" Our prestige wilts a bit, but a great victory would turn the scale," said an Englishman long resident here. He added: " Do you know that the Japs are making white people draw rickshaws at Singapore? " No, I don't know. But I suspect that Japan's deep purpose is to humiliate all white people in the Far East, so that our prestige is ruined for all time. She poses as the saviour of Asia. To drive Europeans out of this region is, I imagine, her intention—possibly Germans as well as Britons and Americans. A Calcutta Editor said to me: " The Japs don't want to cross India to link up with the Boche. They detest the Germans, as they hate us. And how do you think Hitler likes these Jap successes? "

March 10th, 1942.

India becomes increasingly aware of her dangers. Madras is carrying out tactical troop exercises by day and night. The Calcutta *Statesman* calls to-day for local armed forces forming part of the national army, adding: " If the Japanese could push through Assam and Bengal, that would be a miracle of shamefulness. The jungle, instead of being a death trap for our own soldiers, can be made to come alive with hostility to the creeping ants."

A British sea captain, writing from Chittagong, says: " We are helping to bring away the 40,000 odd refugees—Indians mostly—who have walked up from Rangoon and South Burma to Akyab. We brought 900 from Akyab yesterday. . . . The fierce animosity of the Burmese against the more industrious Indians is having full expression. The hordes of Indian refugees are robbed, raped and murdered as they toil along the road, their feeble constitutions unable to stand the strain of a few days

without food. At every stream, spring or pond a gang of Burmese thugs armed with *dahs*, stand guard and charge as much as 2 rupees [about 3*s*.] for a can of water. As most of the Indians are destitute, they cannot pay, and stagger weakly on to the next stream, where they meet with the same refusal, so that they die on the road by hundreds, their bodies putrefying and half-eaten by animals. The bullock carts, which charge as much as 1,000 rupees for a service normally priced at 5 chips, drive over the dead—there are too many corpses to bother to shift them to the side of the road. Cholera is rampant. A thousand refugees leave Prome every day, but less than half that number arrive. The lucky ones who arrive in Akyab take ship to Chittagong and train thence to Calcutta—what to do there, poor devils, I do not know."

I can't vouch for the accuracy of this. I saw no bodies on the road from Rangoon to Prome and on to Magwe on March 7th and 8th. Difficult to see what sense there is in demanding 1,000 rupees from folk who are destitute.

(This occurred at a much later date but since it is relevant, I include it here.)

Two business men who've spent between them about fifty or sixty years in Burma have been cross-examining me about the situation there and in return telling me many things I didn't know. They attribute some of our difficulties there to our Government at home having imposed ideas which are unsuitable, and refused to take advice. The elder, who owned teak forests, said: "We robbed the head man of the village of his authority and put nobody in his place. The result is that the young Burmans have grown up undisciplined. When we asked in past years for a few more battalions of Burmese Rifles, the Government refused and sent another professor or two to teach mathematics or such-like." The other said that Burma had not yet thrown up its own good leaders, as India often has, but the Burmans believe themselves a match for anybody—their Prime Minister would, for instance, imagine himself equal to Mr. Churchill. There are, of course, four or five sorts of Burmans, of varying character. A considerable proportion are hot-tempered, and use their *dahs* (useful as both agricultural implement and sword) on slight provocation; to cut a man down and, five minutes later, be quite calm again, is pretty common, they said. They are often cruel, and to hang a victim upside down over a fire is not rare. Nowadays they will saturate a person in petrol and set fire to him. The Indians fear them; the Burmans regard themselves as superior to the Indians, but are not superior at all. In former days it was ill-behaved or undisciplined for a Burman to enter your presence with anything on his feet or his head uncovered (the reverse of our own notions), but that has changed a good deal. To-day many a half-educated Burman refuses to endure up-country discomforts that Englishmen put up with.

They said that in their view the first thing our people should have done in this emergency was to conscript the elephants, of which Burma had about 1,000 tamed and working, driven by Burmans. Three elephants among them could carry a tank in parts, and take those tanks anywhere—through forests or over mountains. Forest "roads" were usually no more than narrow paths twisting through trees. Elephants and men could negotiate them, but not much else. Talking of mosquitoes, they said there are parts of the delta where even the cattle must be housed in mosquito-proof buildings or shelters. "At night," they said, "we used to issue pillow-cases to our guests, who would sit with their feet in them under the table. Two pairs of socks is a good idea, too."

They were sensitive about criticisms that our business men in the Far East have received. They argued that business men have got on far better with the native people than others have. I had said it was unfortunate that men, owing to climatic conditions and so forth, stayed in these countries a limited time, and got out, having made a modest or immodest fortune; and thus no real continuity occurred; if a family, father and children and grandchildren, remained there, we should know the country better and command more respect. In reply to that, they said that where that had been tried, the family after a generation or two lacked vigour—seemed to lack even the power to reproduce; and that although a man might leave the country (in the customary fashion) at middle age, his son often went back, and continuity was preserved in that way.

March 11th, 1942.

Mr. Churchill's statement on India is awaited here with intense eagerness. On the degree to which Hindus and Moslems find it satisfactory, the extent of resistance to Axis aggression may depend. But if talks I've had to-day with authoritative voices of both those powerful sections are to be relied on, they are anxious to join in fighting our common enemy. A Moslem leader, Sir Nasimmuddin, for instance, said: "We realise how necessary it is that the Germans and Japanese should be defeated for all our sakes. To defeat them, those two Powers must be kept divided, and India is the natural dividing continent. Here, the fight against them can be waged. So far, Moslems have put no obstacle in the way of the war effort. On the contrary, in Punjab and Bengal, warriors and war materials have been richly provided. If, however, Mr. Churchill's statement were to hand us over to the power of Hindus, revolt would follow—and by revolt I mean revolt." (Moslems, although about one in five compared with Hindus, yet provide about 60 per cent. of India's army.) I pointed out to the leader that a "revolt" could hardly do other than hand India over to the Axis Powers, and I believe that this argument has far more influence over Moslems than they pretend. They attempt to argue that Hindu government with authority over them

would be worse than the Japanese, because the Japanese could not allow them to be subjugated. How much is sincere and how much political argument is hard to say. But clearly Moslems must have careful consideration. So far as I could gather, their views would be largely met by a guarantee of Dominion Status of Westminster nature within two years of the end of this war. This would give them time to work out their differences with Hindus and reach agreement. A Hindu leader, Dr. Prosad Mooherje, Bengal's Finance Minister, pointed out how, in Bengal, under stress and threats of war, Bengal Assembly has now a coalition government and that men who, till recently, were bitter opponents are now working together. He stressed the needed formation throughout Bengal's 6,000 " unions " (small collections of villages) of local defence forces to protect their own neighbourhoods (much as our Home Guards do), each local leader being chosen by agreement between police, magistrate, and the civil body. I asked what arms they had or could get? He replied that some have a knife, or machete, some a bow and poisoned arrows, others a variety of clubs. He said they need real arms, but that provision in my view is next to impossible at present owing to lack of munitions.

What's important and what we must take heed of, is a feeling in India that the British Government does not altogether trust Indian people and that were arms available we should refuse to give them. Unquestionably there are Fifth Columnists and pro-Axis elements here, and great care would be needed in organising any force akin to the Home Guard, but unless we display trust to a far greater degree than is apparent and show energy and activity that can be witnessed by all, and take steps to organise guerrilla warfare by Indians themselves, taking their trusted leaders far more into our confidence on military matters than we do, it's difficult to see how we shall unify India as a vast fighting force against the Axis. In these circumstances the Viceroy's appeal to get together cuts less ice than it should. Can we British, plus the Indian Army, keep the Japanese at bay in India, and if not, how can we best fill Indians with a fearless spirit of resistance? That is our problem. At present there's far too much apathy abroad; too many with a feeling nothing can be done. It's our task to destroy that feeling. The machinery of administration needs drastic overhaul and speeding up. An intelligent Indian said to-day: " Things still work as they did in the days of the East India Company—as slow as that." That's an exaggeration, but there's substance in it.

The lunch menu at my hotel has twenty-five items.

Perhaps the most heartening news I've learned concerns the building or improvement of two partly existing roads from India to China as alternatives to the Burma Road. With good fortune, one of these roads may perhaps be operating by mid-May. The creation of both is a

mixture of engineering and industry involving recruitment, transfer, housing of an army of coolies with medical supplies, sinking wells and cutting through one stretch of virgin jungle twenty miles long. This first road, which runs roughly from Manipur Road Railway Station to Imphal in Assam is being built in part by the Indian Tea Association for the Indian Government and in part by the Chinese Government. A second stretch of road the Tea Association is making further north runs from Ledo to Fort Hertz. My information is that about one and a half miles a day of the first-named road is now being built. For the past ten days some 5,000 coolies from tea gardens have been toiling, and a fortnight hence the number will be 25,000 on that single road. That stretch of road being built or improved by the Indian Tea Association is some 120 miles. To Manipur goods will go from Calcutta or elsewhere by the River Brahmaputra or by rail, and thence be transhipped. To enable the road to be built, base camps have been constructed at various points and wells sunk. Unhappily the region is subject to malaria, so six European doctors are working plus one Indian doctor to each five miles of road. Supplies of quinine and other prophylactics to deal with malaria and snake bites have already been despatched. Again, unhappily, as the jungle is cleared, mosquitoes multiply in numbers and venom. At the moment water, which is a great problem, has to be carried and mobile water carts are in use. Four hundred tea-garden lorries are being used. Twenty thousand maunds of rice (a maund is 82·2 lb. in weight) have been sent to several separate places, together with immense stocks of salt, sugar, etc. Another problem is that of housing. No thatch or bamboo exists in the neighbourhood, so hessian tarpaulins have been sent, and these are being used in conjunction with felled trees to provide shelter. All coolies, etc., are volunteers. They're well paid—1 rupee per day of eight hours, plus free food, plus time and a half for *ticca*—otherwise overtime. A part of the road is being built by the Royal Engineers. In readiness for the road's completion large dumps of supplies—not less than 500,000 tons—for passage to China have been established at certain points.

This piece of road will connect with other pieces down the Chindwin Valley, where, at this moment, one of the most tragic processions in all history is winding its way—I mean a company of refugees from Burma estimated at anything from 50,000 to 200,000 souls, with bullock carts or on foot—mostly on foot—a proportion of them suffering from cholera. Recruitment of labour for work on the second more northerly road ending at Yunnan-Fu is now proceeding. This road will be built by 75,000 coolies, mostly Nuniars, who are experts on earthworks.

March 12th, 1942.

I lunched to-day with a young official of the Indian Civil Service who, not long ago, at the age of twenty-four, had a sub-division in Bengal to

look after. He had under his control 1,000,000 Bengal people—administered justice to them, heard their grievances, and generally looked after his area. He worked sixteen hours a day, lived entirely alone, seldom saw a white man, and for this drew about £550 a year. He's a Cambridge University man. He described how the natives use flattery when trying to get round you; one man came and said to him: " I make obeisance to your inspiring feet "—whether he meant perspiring feet, he didn't know. Occasionally women would come and ask to be registered as prostitutes—said they prefered that job to being married. The lowest fee he'd heard of them charging was 4 annas (about $4\frac{1}{2}d.$, which is half the day's pay of a labourer). He said he didn't think that at the moment the labourers and cultivators in that district get enough to eat, partly because of some recent storms and partly because no rice has been shipped (due to shortage of ships) from Rangoon for about a year. When times are bad, crime breaks out—most of it due to economical stress—and they begin looting or thieving. If more than five work together, they call that " dacoiting." These Bengalese have a native weapon, a spear with about a dozen prongs of bamboo tipped with metal.

This sub-district of his, he said, was one of the most lawless in all Bengal, judged by its crime. From it came those who made an attempt on the life of Sir John Anderson; several murderers are living there now. I asked him if he ever went armed. He said: " No. But there was a time when I wore a leather belt round my stomach as guard against those pronged spears." Usually he travelled about in a *sampan*—the only roads were rivers; for about a month in the year he had the use of a motor-launch. I asked him what entertainment he had. He replied " None. I worked from breakfast till midnight or 1 a.m. and then hoped to sleep the rest."

What a fine job this is for a lad in his twenties ! And most sought after. For about sixteen vacancies there were 500 candidates. He said that some of the men doing this job are Indians and, in his view, fully up to the standard of Englishmen. " The problem with India," he said, " isn't that there are not some first-rate Indians—there are—but when you come down below them, the level is a poor one. Because of that, I don't think India can govern herself, although I'm all in favour of letting them try."

March 13th, 1942.

India has 400,000,000 people—and a large number of them appear to be in Calcutta. They swarm. They're a kindly-looking people and often most intelligent-looking, too. But among them are a few crippled to a hideous degree. We drove out to Dum Dum Aerodrome; on the way back our car stopped and a man came, begging. He was the most emaciated figure I've ever seen—his shoulder blades almost protruded from his skin and his arms and legs were as sticks. He held out a hand

piteously, but our driver raised a stick and waved it to ward him off, as though he were contagion itself. The beggar's face was that of a tortured, sensitive man, intelligent but dazed by suffering. He went from us to passers-by on the pavement and all avoided him or ignored him. I did nothing, to my shame. I was spellbound, fascinated as if he were the plague. I've seen other cripples, legs finishing midway between knee and foot, as though some foulness had eaten them off. Too many millions, too many millions, girls wedding at twelve. (P. J. tells me the youngest girl who ever had a baby was aged five—somewhere in Peru.)

I hear that 400 cases of practice incendiaries were sent to Singapore the week before the town capitulated.

Very heavy fighting occurred on the road between Rangoon and Prome—the road we traversed—when our troops under General Alexander fought their way out. Our first attack failed. The enemy had established road blocks; they used dive-bombers and mortars. We made a second, and heavier attack, and broke through. The Gloucesters did brilliant work, but alas ! this word " brilliant " so often means that the price was heavy, too; and it was here.

The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce have been discussing " scorched earth." That policy finds little support among them.

An expert on demolitions said to me that you cannot put an oil-field out of commission longer than about nine months; during those months hard work can put it into service again.

A liaison officer: " If we don't trust the Indians, we are finished. It's too late *not* to trust them."

A Telegraphs official said to Jordan to-day: " There'd be less delay if you provided us with seven copies of each message—because that's the number of copies we have to make."

The General commanding here was quite unaware when we met him to-day of the work being done on roads by the Tea Association. Nor has he knowledge of the situation in Burma. He gets all his knowledge from New Delhi—a situation report, three days late when it reaches him.

I trust we're watching the danger of Fifth Columnists entering India along with the refugees from Burma.

A European woman and two children set off from Rangoon for India with 1,000 rupees—about 75 English pounds. She paid 700 rupees to coolies for carrying her children.

March 15th, 1942.

I drove out across the river—muddy bronze, rather like the Thames—to lunch with a group of administrators who referred to themselves as

bureaucrats. During our talk they spoke of a Chinese from Chungking, here to do his Government's work. They had inquired of him the number of Chinese casualties in the war with Japan—his reply was 12,000,000; for every man Japan had lost, China had lost six. He said quite bluntly they had opposed bodies to weapons.

This Chinese couldn't understand why we wasted so much time getting women and children out of Singapore—thought we ought to have concentrated on evacuating our fighting men; argued we are fighting a ruthless foe who takes no account of sentiment, and we cannot afford to do so, either. When he was asked how China dealt with her workers who panicked when bombed, he answered calmly: " We shot them." (I hear of this same disregard of human life in Russia—and, of course, Hitler and the Germans have it.)

Chiang Kai-shek, I understand, has expressed the opinion that China can continue fighting without further supplies (which normally went along the Burma Road) for a fair length of time, provided the utmost economy is used.

A well-informed administrator said to me a few days ago that some of the Chinese are critical just now; they take little heed of one road we are building, believing that when it's finished the Japanese may be at the other end of it. There are those, I am told, who think that clearing the white man out of Asia is more important than Japanese success. How far these tales spring from our reverses, and how far they are true, it's difficult to say. X. says he's now been in six countries in this war, and we're disliked in them all. But is a ruling nation ever liked ?

There was almost unanimity at lunch to-day when I said our men have not yet been given sufficient of an ideal to fight for—a future and an aim as clear-cut as the Russians and Germans and Japanese have before them. To fight for the *status quo* or for your existence isn't enough. They simply have not got that fanatical spirit our enemies possess. To some of our men the war's a bore and a damned nuisance. They can't quite see *why* they can't go home.

G. tells us that he saw written on an official pad in Mandalay a note saying: " Two unaccredited correspondents in Rangoon are sending uncensored messages." These, presumably, were Jordan and I. On both statements the note was wrong.

To-day Jordan and I went to Calcutta Races. I was reluctant to go this extremely hot day, and I know nothing of racing, but it turned out well. I backed the winner of the first and last races and one of the first three in each of the others. Philip, more accomplished at the game, lost 90 rupees. The minimum on the tote in the third year of this grim war was 15*s*., and the minimum of a bookmaker to whom Philip went was 45*s*.

—that is, you couldn't make a bet of a lesser sum. I used my field glasses for almost the first time since I sailed to Africa last year. It is comical to think how far one carries them and how seldom they are important. So far as aircraft are concerned, I can pick them up in the sky much easier with my naked eye.

Nothing to indicate from this race meeting with gay crowds and beautiful horses that war is marching towards us on wingéd feet.

Until now, according to the law of India, only the Commander-in-Chief has been authorised to speak to the Press. But now, another general has been given authority.

Mademoiselle Eve Curie has arrived from Chungking. We talked about this job of war correspondent. I said: " I sometimes feel I should be better employed brewing the tea in an aircraft factory." She said: " Ever since the war started I have been trying to do a practical job, like driving a truck, but I have never been able to do it. I wanted to do a job of that sort in London, but they soon had me broadcasting, writing, and so on." We talked of the difficulty of telling the truth about things as we find them. We all get depressed about this at times.

Among several appeals to the people of India to unite in face of Fascist aggression, the *Calcutta Statesman* prints one from twenty-four prisoners in Dacca Gaol, most of whom are serving life sentences—a few for the Chittagong Armoury raid in 1930. How seriously these men's manifesto should be taken is doubtful, for it is pretty certain they are using it partly, at all events, as an argument for getting out of gaol. But their argument that, notwithstanding being victims of bureaucratic repression, " our discontent must not drive us into the suicidal path of playing into Fascist hands either by pursuing a policy of opposition or remaining unconcerned," is worth noting.

As a matter of fact, a number of Calcutta's best industrial workers have begun to say that, bombing or no bombing, they will stick to their job.

I met to-day a small group of young Government officials with a high sense of duty who are exercised in mind as to their best function in times of crisis. They wonder, for instance, whether the civil administrators in Burma would have been better employed as liaison officers with the Army, or even as leaders of guerilla fighters. These men have deep knowledge of local people and of geography, and the right employment of these officials is highly important.

I am reminded that the Brahmaputra begins to rise in April and floodings in certain areas start soon after. Monsoons begin near Chittagong early in May and generally elsewhere in June.

March 16th, 1942.

The Indian Government have called for tenders for 5,080 shaving bowls. Much fun in the *Statesman* over this: Does the Indian Army con-

tinue to use old-fashioned razors, and how is the precise figure of 5,080 arrived at ?

In the twelve months immediately preceding Japan's declaration of war, the Japanese took out of Calcutta 1,000,000 tons of pig-iron, some of which they have, no doubt, been dropping on our troops in the shape of bombs. I wonder when we shall begin to compel business to conform to the well-being of the community. It cuts both ways, of course. Not long before this war began a friend of mine bought in London German machine-tools from Germans with which to manufacture shells and other munitions.

One who knows the Jap soldiers well points out to me how different the thick-set Japanese soldier is from the Japanese clerk or industrial worker.

An authority on the Bengal " terrorists " has been giving me a few facts about them. One section of them call themselves *Anushilan Saniti*, meaning " culture party." Another is the *Jugantar* (New Era) party. Between the years 1930–5 over 7,000 terrorists were dealt with. No crimes against officials have been attributed to them since then, and to-day the number interned in Bengal without trial is under 300. These Bengal gentlemen bear resemblance in their methods and attitude to Irish insurgents, and, indeed, Dan Breen's book, called, I think, *My Fight for Freedom*, is sometimes referred to among officials here as the Bengal terrorists' bible. At all events, it has been widely read. Most of the sufferers from terrorists are the Indians themselves. Undoubtedly, some of the discontents have been discussing how to help parachutists; but, on the other hand, some enterprising police officers, who have been putting the British point of view and showing how much worse off the Bengalese would be were the Axis successful, have been achieving some success, and getting occasionally the response: " We never thought of it in that way." The need for good propaganda on our part is urgent, but the problem is not easy. There are at least a dozen parties in Bengal all struggling for power. In this province there are 40,000,000 to 50,000,000 people, of whom only a few thousand are British.

Among even those who roundly abuse us are those who prefer to be tried by a British magistrate.

March 17th, 1942.

An Australian official who was in Singapore shortly before it fell said to me that there were circumstances associated with the loss of *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* so strange that if a novelist had employed them he would have been pronounced imaginative to an insane degree. He said the story couldn't be told till after the war—used the phrase " act of God " (one might preferably use " act of the Devil ").

In Malaya, he said, we had four divisions against twenty.

In Singapore, when the first air raid occurred at 4.30 a.m. nobody believed it was a real one—not at first—and no black-out was in operation.

A tea-planter in Assam complains to the Press that they have had no lead as to whether to stay put, or what to do in the event of invasion.

Eight days after Singapore fell, the Civil Airways here received a bag of diplomatic mail for Singapore from New Delhi.

Despite the comparative coolness and comfort of the early morning hours compared with later ones, banks don't open till 10 a.m. An Englishman long resident here explained that the reason is that owing to *purdah*, women cannot shop alone or even do domestic work which must be done publicly unless their husband is present. So the husband must go to market and help his wife before he goes to business. Here's one of many sidelights on the difficulty of gearing up India for war. The Japanese soldiers won't take any more notice of *purdah* than they do of eloquent speeches from London or Washington.

The oilfields in mid-Burma, which we shall do our best to destroy if the need arises, are three—roughly, one is ten miles long by one mile broad, and two others five miles long by one broad. They have been, so far, China's main source of oil. These oilfields are about forty miles from Magwe, Magwe itself being 250 miles north of Rangoon. General Wavell is in no doubt about Burma's importance. He said this week that the loss of Rangoon and Lower Burma is in some respects a more serious blow than Singapore. Meanwhile we are sensibly substituting in Burma animal transport for a part of our motor transport. More than once the latter has proved a hindrance. We had some small successes this week, capturing enemy guns near Nyaunglebin.

Speaking of India's defence, General Wavell said a day or two ago that no attempt would be made to build coast defences along India's vast coast line. The plan would be to hold mobile reserves within striking distance at threatened points. (This is much like Britain's own plan to defeat invasion.) We are building additional aerodromes and arming flotillas of civil vessels, supplementary to naval vessels, to patrol the rivers of north-east India.

Calcutta's industries, I am told, range over a length of sixty miles. It would be extremely difficult to knock them all out by bombing.

Indians remind me of the Welsh, not only in their voices, but in their reluctance to tell you that things are such and such when they know that the facts will hurt you or displease you. I am told that Spaniards

have the same reluctance. Perhaps, indeed, all pleasant people have it. Is that why the Irishman, knowing the town you are bound for is ten miles away, says, " Sure, it's just a mile or two down the road " ?

I asked an old, distinguished bureaucrat whether he observed any change in the attitude of Indians towards us. " I can smell it," he said grimly.

Day by day the *Statesman* prints pathetic advertisements—personal little things asking for news of this or that person last seen in Hong Kong, or Singapore, or Rangoon. Often they finish: " Mother [or wife, or father, as the case may be] very anxious." How little we realise when we read of one of these disasters to our Empire how much tragedy lies in it, how much of blood and tears !

This hotel I live in has a sprinkling of British people, matrons broad in the beam and men broad of speech, Scotsmen and men of the English North Country, so that I could imagine for a moment that I am on holiday at Bournemouth or Scarborough.

Two or three sidelights on India. A young British business man said: " Men I went to school with, after five years here, are atrophied, vegetated, hopeless." A General said to me : " I've known two high-up generals, one of whom always said: ' These b—— Indians ! ' and the other, when he referred to Indians, always said: ' These damned niggers.' "

Jordan tells one of his entertaining stories on the subject. One of his friends was standing in his London club with a Chinese diplomat. An old Admiral, who is rather deaf, came down the stairs. Philip's friend said: " Oh, Admiral, may I introduce Mr. Chung Ling Soo [that's not the name, of course] of the Chinese Legation ? "

"Oh, Jap, eh ? " said the old Admiral with great heartiness.

" No, no; Mr. Chung Ling Soo—Chinese ! "—in a louder tone.

" Oh, all these yellow men are the same to me," roared the Admiral with gusto.

March 18th, 1942.

I rose at dawn this morning to fly to Karachi; three lots of tea before embarking; a muggy day, warm and moist. Two or three aircraftmen on the 'plane as passengers, and in no time they were all fast asleep, one with his hand on my shoulder.

I have been thinking of an old Indian politician I met the other day, unshaven, with a jovial face a trifle like a gorilla's, who prefaced his speech to me—for he virtually made a speech—by saying that although

we British made mistakes, our rule was founded on justice and righteousness; and he then went on to quote Macaulay at great length.

March 19th, 1942.

I am now at Karachi.

India is a likeable place—baffling, complex, infinitely varied, a mixture of grandeur and filth, of men of noble mien and of hideous cripples. And yet, on the whole, likeable, gentle, courteous, and making me feel these are people I could get on with well.

As I rode down to Karachi Telegraph Office at ten o'clock last night in a spanking *tonga*, the horse trotting along as if he liked it, our lamps lit up a cow lying on the sidewalk. In the afternoon we had passed camels drawing lorries.

To-day I called on the Governor of Sind, who threw yet another small ray of light on India. He said that he and his Prime Minister are supposed to be at daggers drawn; yet when his Prime Minister left for Delhi yesterday and he, the Governor, inquired who will act in the Prime Minister's stead, the latter answered friendlily: " I leave it to you."

Of course, the British themselves cannot live in India and remain unaffected by the climate. Quaint words spring up. An Air Vice-Marshal says: " I sent a *balbo* of 'planes over." Another word much used is *bunderbust*, meaning, apparently, anything from getting theatre tickets to arranging a military sortie. Folk who would be quite ordinary at home, here find themselves with menservants attending their every whim, and journey with a " bearer," who makes life tolerable. No wonder that Dundee men on returning home after managing Calcutta's jute mills are referred to as " the Rajahs of Dundee ! "

The flying boat is not continuing her journey to-day, and I am not sorry. Whether it was the smell of disinfectant (the traffic clerk aboard said he thought we had cases of disinfectant aboard and some had leaked) I don't know, but I found the atmosphere trying. Part of the journey was bumpy, the food came out of cardboard boxes, the air was alternately cold and hot, and at times I felt sick. I dislike flying over mountains in a flying boat, too; I could wish when over land that we had wheels on. This is foolish, no doubt, but I'm always glad when I can see a river or lake in the landscape. But, in truth, I begin to dislike flying—it hurts my ears, makes my head ache and blows out my stomach.

I read during the journey part of Forster's *Passage to India*. How beautifully he hits India off—heat, amiability, parrot-like following of formulas, hopeless complexity, grandeur, filth, the slave-like, the easily-hurt.

This morning no water issued from the taps in the wash-bowl and but a trickle from the bath. I shaved in my drinking water. When my tea was brought, I pointed out the lack. The manservant wearing an Astrakhan tall hat (why, I wonder, in this warmth ?) handed me a note on which the hotel manager had written that the water shortage would last only a few days. Two guests had scrawled on it—the first saying he didn't object to water shortage, but he objected to no water at all, and the second said reproachfully: " You might at least have stored some."

The local newspaper points out to its readers that the dangers of invasion, etc., are really quite small here (Karachi), and that there are plenty of aircraft at hand to deal with anything that arises.

I see Mr. Gandhi is quoted as writing: " If I could convert any city or all cities wholly, including the combatants of yesterday, I should welcome the invading host and try to convert even them or challenge them to do their worst, without offering retaliation. But no such good luck awaits me. If the cities were converted, all India, including the rulers, would be converted and there would be peace in India and peace in the world. But that must remain a day-dream yet awhile. Only I won't be moved from my position by being told that the Jap or the Nazi is not the same as the Englishman. I draw no such fundamental distinction between man and man. . . ." Later in the article (which mainly deals with advice to evacuees) he says: " The greatest problem the newcomers [evacuees] will have to tackle will be to deal with loot and dacoits. It will tax their resources to the utmost. The non-violent way is there. If that is not clear to them, with the co-operation of the villagers they should organise themselves for armed defence against robbers and dacoits. We have too long looked to the Government to do this elementary work for us, not excluding even the reclamation of castes called criminal tribes. The Government cannot do much, if anything at all, at this critical time. The work has perforce to be done by the evacuees, violently, non-violently or both ways."

An itinerant barber waited with his small bag outside the breakfast-room and as my locks grow unruly I engaged him. A good deal of the cutting he did with a razor, as successfully as any other barber. My hair is as I want it about one day in four in the year—on the other three it is either too long or too short. When I was a youth I asked a barber to make a contract with me under which I would visit him once a week for a reduced sum. He wouldn't agree.

Another remarkable sidelight on India:

The Government of Sind (Sind has some 4,000,000 people and is the area of England without Wales) has decided to impose the death penalty for tampering with railway lines, telegraph poles and wires, bridges and other means of communication (these have recently been the object of

terrorist activities by Hurs and dacoits). For the more minor offences of this nature, whipping has been instituted.

At first glance this sabotage would seem to be the work of Japanese or Axis agents but it is only this (I am told) in a secondary degree, or less. The Pir (leader of the Hurs) is in prison in another province for his crimes, and the sabotage I refer to is the work of his followers, trying thus to obtain his release. Probably only forty or fifty men are at work. Some have firearms, but most have only hatchets, their usual weapon.

I have been reading a Government report dated 1896 which deals with Hurs of that period; what's happening to-day is rather similar. The Pir (says the report) is a Moslem religious leader. Once a man becomes a member of the Hur union, he becomes a type of reckless desperado. The religious element is largely present. The outlaws are fanatics, and murder and revenge are more to their heart than mere plunder. The victims in those former days were either Hindu shop-keepers, who yielded the sinews of war, or policemen as representing the Government. The more vigorous the measures taken, the more outrageous the crimes became. So great is the followers' reverence for the spiritual head (says the report) that the present Pir was nearly slain for going into his father's presence with his shoes on. (Murder by the Pir himself is by no means rare, since he's afraid of being supplanted by one or other of his relatives.) He commonly has the most extraordinary influence over his disciples and even in cold weather has been known to collect a lakh of rupees from his poor followers. It was an astonishing sight (says the report) to see the Pir encamped with multitudes of Hurs, men and women, surrounding the place, anxiously awaiting the moment when the door of the *kanat* was opened, whereupon they vied with each other in throwing on the sacred cot money and ornaments of gold and silver. The women plucked off even their marriage nose-rings to satisfy their devotion. Numberless cattle were given away and even land. Vices crept in and immorality. Immorality spread so far that among advanced Hurs adultery of wives, sisters and daughters with *fakir* brothers was regarded with no sense of jealousy or shame—was even connived at. One murderer in the sect slaughtered a woman. Her bones were found and the presumption was she was cut to pieces and boiled in kettles.

This sect of Hurs (continues the report) came into existence about 1843 and as their prosperity has grown so has their fanaticism. They bear to the Pir of Kingri as devoted an attachment as do the Khogas to the person of the Aga Khan. They are not ordinary criminals, and differ from the Baharwatias with their grievances, from the Meenas, whose hereditary trade is plunder, from the Burmans or from the old Baluch raiders of the Frontier. The Hurs have a strong religio-fanatic quality, and their history recalls tales of agrarian outrage in Ireland, of Sicilian

brigands devoted to the Church and giving half their spoils to it, or the Thugs, with their special services and omens before starting out to strangle and rob.

Well, it is these Hurs who, a century after their inception, are proving a damned nuisance in Sind to-day.

As I was writing these notes, a fortune-teller knocked at my bedroom door, a man of thirty or so, plausible. I said he could have a shot if he kept it short. But he was verbose, full of palaver and tricks of the trade. It took him an age to tell me I should live to be sixty-nine, that I should read and write to the end. He said he had in his experience seen only four right hands that resembled mine, one the Maharajah of Patiala's. I think he imagined that that bit of knowledge would be worth 10 rupees, for he now asked for a note of this dimension, which he kept tight hold of—it was necessary for the next prognostication, he said. " You help others, but nobody helps you," he said. " You are here to help your Mother Country." Every time he said something to which I assented, such as the number of children I have, he shook hands with me. He said he couldn't understand why, with a right hand such as mine, I was working so hard. And so forth, till I told him time was up. He had begun the proceedings by saying I could pay him just what sum I liked, but when I requested him to return the 10 rupees (15*s.*) he was pained, adding that he was very disappointed in me. I gave him the rupee I had agreed to give him, and he went, pretending to be deeply hurt.

March 20th, 1942.

A flight-sergeant pilot on the plane reminds me of Y., long lashes, soft eyes, triangular face. I think: " What has he to do with this horrible carnage ? " He's been ill in Iran.

An American passenger tells me the Chinese allow only 15 kilos luggage per head on their aircraft; and that thin men look like Falstaffs when they climb aboard, for all are wearing two or three coats. (What you carry on your person doesn't count in the weight.)

A Flight-Lieutenant doing Army co-operation has been expressing views on sergeant pilots that are my own. He adds that the Army often sends its duds to do liaison with the R.A.F., with the result that mistakes occur, accompanied by losses in personnel. The Army gets bombed, he said, because they don't fire the right signals or they forget to put out their white strips of cloth—" Of course, they probably haven't got 'em, or haven't enough of 'em." Discipline in the R.A.F. is sometimes poor (he said) because sergeant-pilots treat officers as equals and thereupon sergeant-fitters think: " I'll treat them as equals also." All of which

may or may not be true, but is typical of the sort of thing one hears sometimes.

March 23rd, 1942.

Cairo, where I write this note, is beautifully cool after Basra. But I could wish G.H.Q., Middle East, were situated elsewhere. (Allenby shifted it out of Cairo, but he had not the fronts to look after that Auchinleck has to-day.)

Life in Cairo is too luxurious, enjoyment too plentiful. Gezira Club has an atmosphere akin to Ranelagh or a Lido. This is fine for officers and men back on leave from the desert; not so fine for the remainder, and the remainder are numerous. Cairo has its social round, G.H.Q. has a good many pretty women, many officers have their wives or mistresses, Blimpish gentlemen walk about with their swagger sticks and Sam Brownes who have never yet heard a shot fired (and probably never will). The whole atmosphere is as far removed from that of " backs to the wall " (and that's our situation) and from the cut-to-the-bone life of Britain as the sun is from the earth.

Moreover, there's too much liquor drunk.

M. said to-day: " I wish you could see my diary on Singapore. After a tour I made of aerodromes—we had some magnificent ones in that region and the best was never even fought for—a commission of inquiry was appointed at which three or four of us were to give evidence. The other witnesses are now in Japanese hands. When is Churchill going to get good Intelligence and act on it ? "

Germans in the desert are now reported to be using, here and there, Russian guns and Russian shells. The physique of some German prisoners is poor; but it's not safe to draw much conclusion from this; batches vary.

The Field Cashier who paid me to-day said he travelled 18,600 miles in the desert in nine months and paid out some £400,000. In all, £1,000,000 was paid out by desert cashiers during that time.

Captain Vivian Ward, the well-known hunter and crack shot, who has spent forty years in Africa, has been giving me good advice on how to escape malaria. It will sound odd for me now to record that he himself has had malaria 100 to 150 times (as he humorously mentioned), but if such an experienced man doesn't know how to deal with the disease, who does ? He said that when he gets malaria, he promptly takes three aspirin tablets and a dose of whisky and piles all the blankets he can on himself. Once you begin to sweat, the fever gets easier. (To my shame,

I've forgotten how much quinine he takes with the aspirin—10 or 15 grains, I think. And next day he takes quinine every few hours.) Once you're cured, you must begin a six weeks' course—15 grains of quinine a day for two weeks, 10 grains for the next fortnight and 5 grains for the fortnight after. Malaria will, by that time, have been banished from your system. But how to avoid malaria; that's the thing. Take 5 grains a day for several days before you enter the malarial region, keep up the dose while you are in the region, and keep it up for ten days after you leave. If you haven't got the fever by that time, you are safe. The time for the fever to make itself evident is usually between four and six o'clock in the afternoon. You begin to ache, your hands may grow stiff and you feel extremely ill—indeed, you may think you are going to die. But you are not. When, however, you have had malaria many times, you'll not think it worse than getting a bad cold. Over which news you will be cheerful or not, as the spirit moves you.

It occurs to me sometimes that a small proportion of our troops don't appear to regard this war as *their* war; to them, it's somebody else's; they don't know whose. Their equipment is not theirs; this also is somebody else's, as though it might be a railway company's in which they are not shareholders. We've got to make it their war, and *their* equipment, of which they are zealous guardians. An odd officer here and there thinks of little but pay and allowances.

Every time a High-up's son gets a soft job, that fact, when it's known, has a tendency to weaken our war effort.

I believe there's too much difference between officers' food and men's food, when not in battle. Officers should be the fathers of their men.

P. F. S. writes in his *Straight Talk*: "There must be a strengthening of the national sense of duty. We need a new religion that will give religious sanction to the performance of simple duties. The Christian religion is out-of-date. If the sense of duty were stronger, men would not receive preferment because they wore the right school tie or because off-stage they were amusing fellows and sociable."

That's well said.

A Lieutenant-Colonel said to me to-day, "We've got to learn to hate." This reminds me of Lieut.-Colonel B. T. Reynolds saying, as we drove back after seeing Lord Gort in 1939, "Maybe we shall have to make it a holy war."

A Flight-Lieutenant said to me to-night he is ashamed of being half-Irish. He went on to add that the internal condition of Germany is very bad indeed.

It occurs to me that I never saw a Jap in Burma except those 100 feet

up in an aircraft. This is a war wherein you might be forced to withdraw without seeing your enemy.

Further note on malaria: A pilot who has repeatedly flown to West Africa has never had it. Another traveller who's had it five times, said: " I always pass out for forty-eight hours. They pour stuff into me, 10 grains of quinine and two aspirins every four hours. Then I wake up and a voice says, ' Good morning. This is Thursday.' "

B. G. tells me there's a " murder time " in Egypt—when the maize is high enough to cover the malefactor. One common form of murder is that by a brother of a sister who has disgraced the family; they don't murder the lover, they kill their sister, though they may wait years before they achieve their purpose.

March 24th, 1942.

To-day I caught the flying-boat for Lagos. An administrator on the aircraft says: " I can't get a damned decision out of London; I can't get ' Yes ' or ' No ' on anything, so I'm going to see them, going to tell them what I think about them." I myself am charged by various colleagues to tell their respective offices what their grievances are; so easy at thousands of miles distance to get at cross-purposes.

Phrase used to me to-day: " I come from Southport—more brass than breeding there."

As we dived down to earth at Khartoum, I began to be sick. I've never been ill in the air before, though I've often been near it. Several pilots have said to me: " I'm all right at the controls, but if I'd nothing to do, I should be sick as a dog."

I've been reading Adrian Bell's *Corduroy*. I haven't enjoyed a book on our English countryside and farming so much since A. G. Street's *Farmer's Glory*. Bell writes with a limpid ease that's akin to a sweet stream flowing tranquilly through a meadow. There's a bit of the countryman in all of us.

I'm sad in many ways at leaving the Middle East. The welcome I got from Philip Astley and his men when I turned up from Burma was most kind. In about two minutes thay had me in an armchair with a whisky and soda in my fist. And yet I haven't spared my criticisms on occasion. I hate leaving Forrest, Holburn, Ferguson; and yet, from time to time my heart lifts at thought of England like a boat to the waves.

Our aircraft engines have already done 4,000 hours' flying and given almost no trouble. That's British workmanship for you !

March 25th, 1942.

Here at Stanleyville in the Belgian Congo I find we are to sleep three in a bedroom, and that there is one mosquito net to cover three beds. The net is intended to cover one. I've been playing Old Harry about this. The reply is that there are no mosquitoes really—to which I retorted: " In that case why have any nets at all ? And how comes it that the assistant station manager has had malaria twice in six months ? And why do you in the same breath advise me to take quinine ? "

This is the sort of sloppiness (one net to three beds) that infuriates me. I said that any carelessness of this sort which leads to British officers catching malaria is a disservice and blow to our war effort. My two companions, an Army major and a Fleet Air Arm pilot, slept out on the veranda without nets. By the grace of God, next morning they were unbitten. All the same . . .

An officer from Nairobi tells me that he and his companions were kept hanging about there for three months awaiting instructions to move. Twice a day they would ring up Movement Control. They rang up as usual on the final morning. No news. At 4.30 p.m. they rang up again and were then told: " We've looked for you all day. Report here at once." (This was thirty miles distant.) My informant said: " Africa is full of —— [common army term for blah and nonsense] of the most refined and delicate kind."

Two black, gnarled elephants were harnessed to the dust-cart. It's often said you cannot tame African elephants. These looked tame enough. It was market day in Stanleyville. As I sat at the hotel door, a slow procession walked past—black women with two or three yards of yellow, blotched cotton material wound over their bosoms and round their waists. Many a one had a child tucked into the fold of cloth above the waist, and an enamel bowl on her head. After they had passed, they would turn their heads to look at us, and you caught the whites of their eyes in that inquiring, comical stare that artists so often have captured.

We flew over forest and jungle—only an occasional flock of white birds reminded us that life stirred below.

The mud-coloured Congo winds and twists among the greenery, here and there a *cul-de-sac* where the river has tried to venture and had to retrace its steps.

It was quite cool at 6,000 feet.

I've been pondering on the Britain we had before the war, and how we contrived to keep going—agriculture and fisheries in the doldrums, many shipyards " sterilised," cotton exports largely finished, coal a very mixed bag; one sometimes thought that only cinemas and motor cars, cosmetics and gramophones and petrol stations flourished—and they

were no more than the froth on English beer. For how long could we have gone on at that rate? Not long, I think.

A fat sailor—maybe he's a cook or steward when he's on his ship—has just come to ask if I'd like a cup of coffee, and fetched me one. (We've no steward on this flying-boat, but in thermos flasks we've got coffee, lemonade, water, etc.) I'm sometimes bowled over by people's unexpected kindness.

A R.A.F. pilot tells me that when a Kittyhawk gets on the tail of a German 109F Mark II, the German aircraft just goes straight up and leaves the Kittyhawk. But the German machine isn't so well armed.

A Fleet Air Arm pilot says he'd like to transfer to the R.A.F., because the R.A.F. have more exciting work to do. His own job has been, in the main, guarding convoys, and he found it dull—he wants to take part in sweeps. I said: "Dull or not, your job guarding convoys is magnificent—none more important in the world." He said that when he went to Africa in convoy last year they were shelled from seven miles distant.

He spoke of an Australian pilot—a born leader—who shot down six enemy in one day. "You may be going round in a tight circle and you see, suddenly, that another chap above you is going round the opposite way as protection—and that will be C. He's gone over El Adem when the Germans were in strength there, merely to test his machine. Pilots are usually small men, quick and neat. This Australian is about 6 feet 2 inches. When big men are good, they are *very* good."

March 26th, 1942.

Leopoldville is an improvement on Stanleyville, though not precisely a health resort. A Civil Servant tells me you can stand the place for three or four months and that's all. (He's been here a year.) His secretary has an affected heart and an enlarged spleen, principally due to malaria.

My companion has tucked his socks over his trousers to guard his ankles against the pests, but women sit about half-naked—European women.

The Belgian Congo (in the view of a British official) could raise 200,000 soldiers if given white officers and N.C.Os.

A Sub-Lieutenant said to me: "I met an American and his wife both acting as ferry pilots and each drawing £60 or £70 a week bringing Liberators, etc., over from U.S.A."

A petty-officer who was on the *Latona* when she was sunk by dive-bombers said: "It was eight o'clock at night—moonlight—light as day. We'd four torpedo attacks in the first half-hour and then I lost count. Two destroyers came alongside and took us off—we were blazing like a

torch then. We lost only sixteen ratings, four officers and eight Army officers. They bombed us right to the finish, high-level, low-level and dive-bombing. The dive-bombing did it at last. I see our last convoy to Malta got through—they'd 150 bombers over them at one time. We only lost one small ship."

Adrian Bell describes in *The Cherry Tree* how the local farmers all declared they were going to bait their M.P. on the Government's shortcomings, but how, after a good dinner and beer, it fell away to next to nothing. What's the secret? Lack of courage when confronted with the actual person? Or good nature? Whatever it is, the trait is common among men. Those who vow they'll say so much often say nothing at all.

March 28th, 1942.

I'm in the military transit camp at Lagos, Nigeria, waiting for an aircraft or a ship to Britain. Several officers are here from East Africa, including a Colonel (said to have supplied Edgar Wallace with some material for *Sanders of the River*) who was until recently in charge of a prisoners-of-war camp with 3,000 Italian officers. Among those prisoners were six or seven members of an orchestra at Milan. " In another month or two I should have had the best orchestra Nairobi has ever heard," he said. He added: " I don't wonder we beat the Italians. They've no ability to organise. A party of them wanted to build a church. I provided axes and tools and arranged to send them off in motor transport at 8 a.m. They didn't turn up. It took them four mornings before they could turn up at the right time."

Another officer, a captain, told me he was A.D.C. to the Duke of Aosta before the latter died. (This was the first news I had had of his death, said to be due to tuberculosis.) I asked if he were very ill before he died. He said not until the last week. Before that, Aosta didn't seem to know his end was near. Aosta said one day: " I'm not reading to-day —when I'm not well, reading makes my eyes bad, and I must not injure them, because I am a pilot "—apparently looking forward to the time when he would fly again. Aosta, he said, was very pro-British and had spent some time trying to arrange for a British-Italian force to fight in Africa, at the time of the Abyssinian War. (This sounds curious. There is, however, a pretty general opinion that Aosta would have assumed power, possibly as some sort of Regent, in Italy when Mussolini falls.) The officers in the Colonel's camp were in no doubt that, whoever won the war, they, the Italians, had lost it. About three-fourths of those Italian officers were really civilians, who had been called up. Among them were several road engineers, and two who had taken a leading part in draining the Pontine Marshes. They were anxious to work, in order to maintain their skill. The Colonel said he repeatedly sent in lists of these men to Headquarters, but nothing happened—no use was made of the men.

Lagos is both hot and humid—humidity, I'm told, of 90 per cent. This camp is formed of huts with roofs of rushes—about three officers to a hut, each with his separate room, holding bed, table, etc. I am rather distressed. Last night I changed a £5 Egyptian note to West African money. This morning in a chemist's shop I found I had only one West African pound—about £3 10*s*. had vanished. I've told my " boy." He seems honest and appears to be as disturbed as I am. I kept my room door open all night, but I was restless and don't think anybody could have entered without my knowledge. Besides, the notes were in my wallet, and cheek by jowl with one West African note still remaining there, and some Belgian Congo notes. I can see nothing for it but that some clever thief opened my wallet while I was at the bath this morning, took some notes and left others. But I was absent from my room only a few minutes. My " boy " has been telling me how, when a previous officer was here, he, the " boy," picked up one day £9 from the floor. I gather this officer had had a lively night and was tipsy.

It's amusing to note how we British stick to our customary breakfasts in hot regions. At Leopoldville we had fried ham and scrambled eggs—but nobody ate it all. This was at 5 a.m. To-day we had sausage and bacon—and all of us moist with sweat. Evening attire is drill tunic and slacks, collar and tie, belt, and mosquito boots. I, having no such boots, wore my ankle boots and used my battle-dress gaiters. Ankles are extremely vulnerable to mosquitoes—somebody suggests it is because of added acidity there. I've been taking my 5 grains of quinine a day for the last three days—don't observe any effect on me. But a lot of quinine turns you deaf. I am taking such precautions as I can against malaria, because if I get it (and journey by sea) it will arrive when I'm about a week outward bound, and that will be no joke on a cargo ship.

I was told in the Western Desert that one pilot in four ferrying aircraft across Africa gets malaria. I am also told here that N.C.Os. and men are slack about taking their quinine and get ill through not taking it. Why don't they parade them every morning and see that they *do* take it?

March 29th, 1942.

A trying night, exceedingly sticky. Very thankful when daylight came.

Sat at dinner last night with a Colonel of Tanks I had met at Brighton over a year ago—looks about forty, but must be approaching fifty, for he wears the Mons Star. He commanded our " I " tanks with the New Zealanders and fought his way into Tobruk. As he was fighting in, his son, an Adjutant in the tank force inside Tobruk, was fighting his way out. The two forces met, but his son had been killed that morning. What tragedy lies here.

He's going home now to tell of the lessons we have learned, that we

may profit by them. Yet he's going by sea in all likelihood. Why? Because the pressure on our aircraft is too great to give him a passage. Yet Lady Duff Cooper could fly home a few weeks ago.

On this air route to Britain we have only a small number of aircraft working. Again why, at a time when we are turning out immense numbers—I suppose we and U.S.A., 2,000 a month? This Colonel's services will be lost to our cause for four, six or eight weeks while, at great risk, he ploughs home. What a waste!

At an acquaintance's house last evening, when we had a whisky and soda at 7 p.m., they served quinine with it—that is, a box of tablets was on the tray. I had gone to lunch, and we talked throughout the afternoon. My two hosts provide an information service for Nigeria—one of them was lecturer in anthropology at Oxford. His mind and mine were much in tune on what we should do towards achieving equality of service and sacrifice. We were at variance, however, on whether our British children are born in the right houses. I had said that a large percentage come from the wrong houses—too poor, of parentage too unintelligent. I said our High Court judges and folk of that sort are not reproducing themselves. He said: "You'd be surprised to know how many judges produce mental defectives." Some hyperbole in that statement, no doubt, but his point was that from the lower classes we constantly throw up people of quality—mentally defectives produce sometimes good sane folk, and people of high intelligence produce the reverse sometimes. A bit of Nature's malice, I suppose.

These two men were critical of the B.B.C.'s service. They quoted the B.B.C. statement that in Malaya 17,000 Australians were engaged and only 247 were killed. They argued that that caused folk hereabouts to ask: "Did the Australians really fight?" In other words, what may be good propaganda for Australia isn't good or necessarily good elsewhere. Again, they were tired of the B.B.C.'s war commentators, who have seldom anything pointed or profitable to say. I agree. The B.B.C. sticks to its folk too long—no matter how good Priestley and Wickham Steed and Co. are, we need changes. I myself was getting talked out when I came abroad last year, yet the B.B.C. were eager for me to continue. One of my companions made the excellent suggestion that when the B.B.C. is going to refute an Axis statment, they should give the Axis statement in Haw-Haw's own voice (or whoever's it is) and then refute it. They criticised, too, the B.B.C. habit of quoting an Axis statement, such as: "The enemy claim to have occupied Benghazi, but there is no confirmation of it." When, as occasionally happens, the B.B.C. quotes our own authorities as confirming the statement twenty-four or forty-eight hours later, it enhances the Axis and depreciates our own information service.

There is a club or mess in Lagos where the local defence men meet, but " shop " (meaning discussion of military problems and subjects) is barred. How unwise this is ! Surely they would be well occupied talking over these problems from all angles. This banning of " shop " is a survival of an old and antiquated military notion. Few men talk so well as when they talk " shop."

Flying in a Liberator at 25,000 feet is no joke. A Major who did it recently tells me he went to sleep and his oxygen apparatus iced up. He had got blue in the face and begun to twitch before he was noticed. He had a narrow shave. You are warned that on no account must you fall asleep, but it is dark and very cold (there's no heating; you wear R.A.F. fur-lined clothes) and the impulse to sleep is very great. He was taken to F. for a test to find if he could stand the journey. (You are placed in a chamber and " compressed " to the requisite height and down again in half an hour.) He got a considerable pain in the head during the journey and his ears crackled a lot. But he is middle-aged. This 25,000-feet flying is a young man's job. I don't wonder an Air Ministry official said to me: " I wouldn't allow you to go on a Liberator. Some of them emerge very dickey."

I called on the Governor, Sir Alan Burns, this morning, and we chatted for half an hour. He was wearing a suit and collar and tie and looked comfortable; I sweltered. He was vigorous and alert. He's really Governor of the Gold Coast and came to Lagos some months ago, after an absence of eight years; said the changes in that time have been very great. He, too, was critical of the B.B.C. " The other day, on the two o'clock news, they announced that an Australian pilot had won the D.F.C., and they proceeded to give a lengthy account of what he had done—quite a good show, but not very remarkable. No mention of any English pilots winning anything or doing anything. Now, this happens frequently, until people here—the West African people—begin to think the British are all sitting safely at home doing nothing. The Axis make the most of it—try to stir up bad blood between us and Australia—Britain fighting to the last Australian. More attention should be paid to propaganda for West Africa, but I know it is difficult, because most of those at home who ' know West Africa,' knew it twenty years ago, and it has changed too much for those men to be good propagandists to-day."

He thought there's no doubt the Germans are using Dakar as a submarine base.

What a pity the Free French didn't take Dakar long ago ! All West Africa would then fall into our hands, and we might release considerable forces for fighting elsewhere.

Nigeria has 22 million people, 17 millions of them in the " Bush." He spoke very highly of the emirs of tribes, some of them administering areas

with immense populations—in one instance, 3,000,000 people. They administer, and hold judicial courts, and do the job well. There's usually a white resident administrator, too, but the best of them, he said, keep in the background, watchful, ready to help or advise, but interfering as little as possible. Many of the emirs are shrewd, able men.

I asked the Governor if events in the Far East have influenced feeling here much. He said those events have strengthened the resolution of people, such as the emirs. They have not forgotten or forgiven Hitler for his remarks in *Mein Kampf*, when he spoke of these " half-apes " in Africa and said it was a sin to educate them.

From another source I learn that the Germans were cunning in granting big credits when trading with the West Africans; this had some influence. The West Africans are deeply concerned with money-making.

D. tells me that it is a little embarrassing, the fashion in which his " boys " make good any deficiency in spoons. If his own house is short of spoons, and he goes to stay as a guest somewhere, taking his " boy " with him, his house has a galaxy of spoons the day after they return home. One of his boys caddied for me yesterday and I gave him 1*s*. The lad was delighted and took the coin to his master, saying what a big master *I* was. These " boys " talk a pidgin-English I cannot follow. The Lagos Broadcasting Station puts out a speaker in pidgin-English—and I can't understand this either. Speaking recently, the broadcaster said, describing a fight, that the Australians had killed " five hundred Japs, that's all." But " that's all " meant " and that's that "; he wasn't depreciating their achievement.

March 30th, 1942.

I was called to the telephone last night and found it was Randolph Churchill; he was at Government House, on his way back to Middle East. He sent a car to the camp and I went down to see him. When we joined the Governor's large circle upstairs, we in our corner spoke of Burma and the way a majority of the Burmese had turned against us. Randolph said to me, banteringly, " It's you Liberals who're responsible for this. If we'd given them bayonets instead of pampering them, they'd have fought for us." I said: " Damn it, your Tory Party has had almost absolute power for about ten years, and you're mainly responsible for the mess we're in. I suppose the truth is you haven't had the guts to do what you felt in your bones you ought to do." He said, smiling, " Just what I said at dinner." I told him what F. has said to me, that when you have armed forces, a small percentage of whom are subconsciously in doubt whether what they had before the war, and the system they lived under, was worth dying for, then you may have an odd man here and there with a weakening of his fighting qualities.

Our Government, I said, lamentably failed to make drastic changes in our social system as soon as war started—they've tried to carry on " business as usual." Putting it on its lowest basis, they would have been wise (I said) to try to appear to be the designers of inexorable social changes rather than limp along painfully in the rear of events—as they have done. I said that even to-day we have no truly fair and equitable rationing system. He said: " Do troops fight better if you promise them all double wages after the war, and no unemployment any more?" I said: " No, not perhaps on a statement of that sort, but if we had started off the war by seeing that soldiers and munition workers were paid the same wages, and that rationing was equal, and had we really tried to make sacrifices equal, I believe that would have had a powerful effect."

He spoke highly of the Commandos, and said he wanted to get back to them. (He went out to Middle East in a Commando before joining G.H.Q.)

Randolph strikes me as a generous spirit. He's impetuous, entertaining, and with a gift for quoting bits of satirical verse. He quoted Belloc on who was the worst Prime Minister, Neville (I think) or Baldwin, or Ramsay.

March 31st, 1942.

Talking with H. the other day about our comparatively light losses in this war as compared with the last, I said that I sometimes wonder now at the quiet way in which we accepted our heavy losses on the Somme—some 60,000, I think, the first day. He replied: " We were a tougher generation then." I wonder—tougher? *or* is it that we are more thoughtful now? He went on to say that it's not much use now appealing to men to fight for the honour of the regiment—that means little or nothing to them. (But I think the honour of England means a great deal.)

There is a sense in which the remarkable thing about Lagos (I suppose in old days " the white man's grave ") is its ordinariness. You drive along a road between villas—grass and trees, flowers, gardens—and you think: " This might be an English suburb on a summer's day. The golf course might almost be an English golf course a few miles inland from the sea, except that here the greens are built of sand, circular, completely flat, but some fast and some slow (surprisingly enough)." Lagos is unhealthy no doubt, yet I met a Civil Servant yesterday who's been here twelve years and never had fever. The English are pale, and look hot and rather unhealthy. One said: " You are all right here if you can sleep. The nights, after a year or so, get you down." The Civil Servants work through the hot afternoon—they don't take the afternoon off, as many do in the hot weather in Cairo. (Cairo resumes again about 5

p.m. and goes on till 8 p.m. Here they often work straight through till 8 p.m.)

But while a few aspects of Lagos are ordinary, others are strange, indeed—even apart from the miasma at night, which smells horrid. As we golfed two days ago, the tom-toms were beating—maybe for a wedding, or funeral, or birth, or death. In the bush they beat to tell of the approach of a white man or albino. " Ta-ta-taaa " they go, the last note higher in pitch (achieved by tightening the drum skin). The cemetery road yesterday was crowded with motor-cars—an important funeral. Each day about 4.30 or 5 p.m. funerals wind along the road—long processions of men and women, the women in their figured blouses and yards of figured and coloured material wound round their heads and twisted into various shapes. They make much of funerals.

I asked my companion if many are Christians. He said, " Yes," a great many. But among the young people there's a revolt against Christianity, and among the middle-aged, too. They are in revolt against monogamy. It's long been customary for a man to have more than one wife or woman, and to-day, he said, it's rare for a man to content himself with but one woman. If he's married, he has his concubines. I asked were the women, then, so numerous compared with the men ? He said: " No, but they travel round with high velocity."

It's amusing to hear Europeans speaking to the " boys." My golfing companion said to our caddie, " These masters go this way," when we were leaving him. There's a good deal of shouting at the " boys " by officers in this camp, and some abusive language used.

The " boys " are lazy and shiftless, often enough, I dare say, but I can't think this bawling at them is the right way. However, men get irritable in this heat.

Lizards run about my room—some of them with a reddish-yellow head and a coloured band round their tail.

X., now doing information work here, was formerly doing a piece of research at Oxford. Nobody is doing that research now; it has just stopped. I asked whether he wouldn't be better employed going on with it. He said he might, but if he did, he'd be in the street in a year or eighteen months, since nobody in England is much interested in our men of research.

I broadcast from Lagos Station last night; drove out a mile or two to a group of wooden huts, spoke into a small red " mike." This morning Colonel Y. said, grinning: " I hear you spoke in pidgin-English last night."

I asked an English schoolmaster who has taught here, on and off, for ten years whether the children are as intelligent as Europeans. He

replied that he can see no difference in intelligence, but here all their school work is hard, grinding study, so that a lad of eighteen has the same attitude towards many aspects of life as a prep. boy in England—he hasn't grown up as fast. Coming from an illiterate home, he's had no help there; it takes him three weeks to read what an English boy reads in an evening.

When I lent some books to an officer and offered him *Hamlet* (among others) he said: " I've never read Shakespeare—I'm not educated up to it." I persuaded him to take it. He's a Regular and D.S.O.; seems to be first-rate at his job.

A R.E. officer showed me his cigarette case, presented to him by the Sheffield Sewage Disposal Board staff, and so inscribed. This inscription is a standing joke (something akin to Wigan Pier). He told a good story of Dunkirk. A Major in the Dental Corps brought his instruments down to the beach, trying to get them to England, and built a small protective dugout of them, and was digging or scraping down in the sand when a soldier hove up. This soldier was holding his jaw. He had come through a lot of shellfire and bombing along the beach to reach the dentist, and now he knocked at these boxes. He had an awful toothache, he said. Could the dentist do anything ? The dentist laid him on the sand and, in order to get some purchase, sat on the lad's chest. Then, with a strong pull, yanked out the tooth. " That better ? " The lad spat out blood, thanked him and ran off doubled-up through the shelling, stopping now and then to spit out blood.

News in Nigeria must usually be spread by word of mouth. War news gets garbled. Thus: It was rumoured that poison gas from the ex-German Cameroons was causing coughs and colds in Calabar; many thought a return of the 1918 influenza epidemic would result from the new war. Again, a falling star was mistaken for an aircraft. An amusing sidelight: In Aba, a town crier deliberately announced a submarine was approaching the town (the town is inland) hoping in the confusion to help himself to loot. Curious examples of ignorance: One Nigerian thought the loss of a 5,000-ton ship meant the loss of 5,000 lives; and another man thought Warsaw was a new weapon.

Of zest in our behalf, consider these:

Natives at Warri were seen using machetes, accompanying each stroke with: " That one for the King."

The Alafin of Oyo asked that after Hitler's defeat and death his skin should be sent to Oyo to enable the custom to be complied with of making a drum from the skin of a treacherous enemy.

When the Ibadan Council was asked for help, they replied: " Certainly, for if the cow dies, what will the cow-birds do ? " (birds of the egret family which follow the cattle).

A wild pagan chief embarrassed the District Officer by appearing with naked archers and asking where he was to go and fight; another offered his three sons, who, he said, were ready to go to Berlin to dispose of Hitler.

A chief, speaking of the extortions of another, said: " He is not a man to be treated gentlemanly for his corruptibility, but Hitlerily."

Lagos, during its War Savings Week, subscribed over £14,000, which is about 2*s*. a head. This is remarkable, having regard to the small earnings of some " boys." A " boy " in his teens might earn 3*s*. a month.

The Nigerian Infantry Brigade served in East Africa and led the advance of 1,060 miles after the Juba was passed. Their speed and courage was remarkable, said General Cunningham.

Nigeria, under pressure of war, has created new industries—dairying, pig-keeping and bacon, butter and sack-making, and manufacture of string and twine. Her output of tin and rubber can be heavily increased —tin is mined by mostly primitive methods and nobody knows what her potential wild rubber output is; the survey has never yet been thoroughly made. Rice and cane sugar have considerably expanded. Blanket-weaving has begun. Experiments are being made to find out if castor oil can be turned into a lubricating oil. (Some of us have thought it was that already.) There is no unified West African agricultural scheme, and it's time there was.

How ignorant one is of our Empire ! Here is a country bigger than France where Englishmen spend their lives, and I knew nothing about it. Natives, for example, cycle as much as eighty-odd miles to procure rubber seed. There's a moment in rubber cultivation when the bark or the pods, or whatever they are, crack like bullets hitting their mark.

April 1st, 1942.

I went for a swim to-day with a Lieutenant-Colonel who for twenty-five years has had a duodenal ulcer, but who at the age of forty-nine turns somersaults in the bath and who, at forty-four, captained a water polo team. What a fine conquest this is over human frailty ! He is never without an ache in the stomach, yet he has been leading his tanks into action and has the D.S.O., richly earned.

I wonder if our military authorities realise how important to morale letters from home are? We are a home-loving nation; our men feel dreadfully cut off when no mail reaches them. Yet from November 18th to January 10th no letters reached this tank battalion in Libya. When they emerged from the battle, the men said: " Now for some mail ! " But it wasn't there. Eventually they discovered a bag here and a bag somewhere else.

A pen-picture was drawn for me of General Freyburg, V.C., directing a battle from his trench in the desert 18 inches deep, and giving the order: " Get stuck into them ! "

Our generals never lack personal courage. But their ability to make a good plan of battle is more debatable.

I have been reading an account of the work of one of our " I " tank battalions in the Western Desert. They earned the nickname " Night Fighters " for their capital work in tackling the enemy by night—usually thought to be an impossible task for tanks. This battalion began with fifty-seven tanks, but after a week, only a fraction of this number was left. Some tanks bore thirty battle scars. Unshaven, dog-tired, with blackened faces, the men would usually withdraw from the fight at night to partake of their only meal of the day—bully and biscuits and salty water. When the meal was ended, the men would fall-to on work of maintenance, and after that, drop down under a tarpaulin for a short, deep sleep. As for the tank commanders, they were often quite speechless from shouting orders during the battle. (The tanks need voice amplifiers.) On December 1st, at the day's close, the area was a mass of charred and twisted tanks, with a deep pall of smoke enshrouding it.

The Tanks Colonel I have mentioned said to me: " My men make me feel humble sometimes. There was a lad badly wounded in the face. His comrades gave him morphia and laid him on the floor of the tank while they went on fighting. When he came round, they wanted to put him outside the tank but he wouldn't go—he stayed in the tank and fought all day. When he climbed out that night his face was the size of a football."

He told me another story, too. A shell penetrated one of our " I " tanks, killing three and severely wounding the young officer and gunner. The tank was set on fire and ammunition began to explode, so that the gunner received five cartridges in his leg. He was quite unable to help himself, but suddenly he found himself being lifted and dragged towards the roof. It was the subaltern, himself wounded, who was doing the lifting. He had tried to open the door over his head and at first had failed; had tried again and this time got it partly open. The wounded lad felt himself being pushed slowly, so slowly, through this half-open door. At last he was on the tank roof. He now turned to try to help the officer. The subaltern had been less gravely wounded than the gunner, but now he had himself collapsed and lay on the tank floor among the flames. You can imagine the agony of mind of the lad whose life had been saved. He (the gunner) had a broken leg, was badly burned, and had five gunshots. He was powerless to save his officer, who might have saved himself. The subaltern died in his tank.

The Colonel said: " I have recommended him for the posthumous V.C. But he may not get it—there ought to be three witnesses. In this case, there can be only one."

I said: " Well, if he doesn't get the V.C., I suppose he'll get the D.S.O."

" No. It's the V.C. or nothing. Nothing else can be given if the recommendation is made after a man has died."

" But—why? He ought to be given something. Consider what a solace it would be to his people."

" I know, but there it is. Not only that; as you know, many a man is recommended for the D.S.O. or the M.C. and is killed in a later action, before the award comes through—awards often take six months to come through—sometimes longer."

Um. Another thing to be put right.

In a night attack the Colonel made, he recaptured some of his men who'd been taken prisoner. They climbed on to his tank in the darkness to shake hands with him. Before the attack he had sat down quietly and thought it all out. " I thought it was all up with us, myself included. I pondered whether to write anything—and decided better not. I got up and started work. I had so much to do, I'd no time to think any more."

Two or three of our senior tank officers have said they were disappointed on reaching Cairo to find out how little notice was taken of what they had learned, and what they had to say.

D. told me an ironical tale of a detachment of men who arrived on this West Coast of Africa by mistake—they had been sent off to " the west coast "—and everybody had assumed it was Africa. But it ought to have been Scotland. After four months they reached Lagos. Their mail had, meanwhile, followed them and reached Freetown. But it was held at Freetown, because, it was argued, they might be sent back through Freetown. For four months they had had no communication from home, and presumably their home no communication from them.

April 2nd, 1942.

Got up at 3 a.m. after a sleepless night, for I couldn't rely on anybody calling me. Colonel Y. walked over from his hut to see if I were awake, which was kindness indeed. Soon after dawn we set off by Clipper for Lisbon. We've two or three generals on board, but they're in plain clothes, and in plain clothes our generals might be solicitors or doctors or business men, except that they are usually a trifle shabbier. We had a good breakfast on the craft (a cereal, cold ham and coffee). The ship is steady as a rock; dull roar like a power house. We've got a wardrobe for our coats, a dozen American magazines lie about, and to-morrow night we shall go to bed in pyjamas on the way to Lisbon. And yet, as you approach the Clipper, she looks little bigger than a flying-boat. Only when you walk into her does she assume her right dimension. The

tapestry on the walls is covered with a map of the world constantly repeated—and it must be said, out of scale in parts, so that you form a wrong notion of how far you have to fly.

We've got a few Australian airmen among our passengers. One of them was a gunner on the aircraft which took Oliver Lyttelton to the Middle East last year. " One night," he said, " I kicked him in the pants by mistake. We were attacked by a night-fighter in the Med. and I went into the gunners' cabin to rouse the chaps. There was no time for politeness. I didn't know till afterwards I had roused Mr. Lyttelton. His wife and butler were on that trip, too. No, we don't often get attacked, and that attack didn't last long."

April 3rd, 1942.

One of our engines became troublesome approaching Bathurst, so we stayed overnight, and slept on board very comfortably. I was up first at 6.45; nobody stirred for another half-hour. We are all short of sleep, judging by our capacity for sleeping on voyages.

Our genius for blunders is not new. K. tells me that at the end of 1919, fourteen Army officers turned up at Archangel in mistake for South Russia, drank steadily for two weeks, and went back to England. He was at Archangel at the time. When an officer in the Cheshire Regiment in 1914, he wrote to the War Office for a copy of the history of the regiment (a War Office product). It duly came, but the history didn't go beyond 1848 !

I have been reading U.S. magazines, *Liberty*, *Life*, *Spot*, *American*—empty stuff, and a good deal of braggadocio. William Hickey, in *Life*, reports Americans saying to him: " The British are still retreating step by step, eh ? " and " Why, you couldn't fight your way out of a paper bag." Very difficult for us not to be critical of one another, for we've both blundered, judged badly, suffered from Big Business. But we've got to be tolerant and pull together. Our soldiers and airmen, serving alongside Americans, are going to find themselves drawing a good deal less pay (an American tells me that a junior officer in their Air Corps draws as much as a British group captain; American private soldiers wear a collar and tie; ours don't), and the Americans are going to find England dowdy and our girls less smartly dressed. To all of which we shall be tempted to answer: " We've been fighting this war two years longer than you, and it's always been your war as much as ours." So we must both watch our step or Mr. Hitler will be laughing.

Bathurst. This must be the place Randolph Churchill had in mind when he spoke of our colonial tin shacks. Our lads are playing football in the sun, stripped to the waist, brown and pink.

Comments on the fact that at 8.30 this morning nobody was at work on a flying-boat in dry dock. The R.A.F. repairers were just arriving to begin, and then stood about. Those of us who don't work are always critical of those who do. We see a man leaning on his spade in the road and, not having ourselves done a hand's turn all day, want to know why he is resting.

This is the Clipper Mr. Churchill flew back from U.S.A. in. Curious this should be the one, because had I been in Britain when he went to sign the Atlantic Charter, I should have accompanied him to describe the ceremony—three of us were to go to do that.

Too many women travel on these aircraft. A British Airways manager in India said to me: "We sometimes get a message: 'Mr. So-and-So has priority. His wife has no priority, but she must on no account be taken off the aircraft.'" Privates and colonels can fight this war without their wives' company, and other folk can fight it also—if they have to. There's still much too much privilege. An official photographer (an Army officer) was sent in Cairo to the residence of a High-up to take a passport photograph of the maidservant ! Damned impudence.

April 4th, 1942.

I had looked forward to Lisbon, but things went astray somewhat. The previous day had been one of celebration in the city, and the Customs officials were late—indeed, they appeared to be hours late. The leisureliness of so much connected with travel is remarkable. We hung about for an hour or two, the generals much more patient than I was. (Military discipline, I suppose.) Money was the next problem; we drove to the British Embassy. They were kind; many they helped, but they could not help me. I must try the Press Attaché. But he had not arrived. It was turned 11 a.m. when we began the drive to a hotel—but to our dismay (or my dismay) found we were driving out to Estoril, fifteen miles off. Estoril is a picturesque place, but it isn't Lisbon, and nobody wanted to go there. And we were still breakfastless, and, as it happened, hungry. We turned breakfast and lunch into one. The next problem was to return to Lisbon. It took us hours to persuade British Airways that we were willing to buy our own dinners in Lisbon (they had ordered dinner in Estoril) and to bring us back to the city. We eventually reached the city about five o'clock. We ate tea in a teashop (delighted by the spectacle of stout Portuguese women standing up devouring cream cakes as though they were starving), did a little shopping, and then, in my case, returned to the Embassy and cashed a traveller's cheque. During the morning I had accepted an invitation to supper which kept me till it was time to drive to the Clipper. (Our car then refused to start and at

11 a.m. we were to be seen laboriously and frantically pushing her up and down a Lisbon road with your humble servant assuming a phlegm he did not feel.) So I learned nothing much of Lisbon, except that most of the journalists who made it their hunting ground have departed, and that hopes are springing up that the entire Peninsula will succeed in keeping itself out of this war. Food gets shorter and about the only articles you can now officially take out with you in the shape of foodstuffs are tinned sardines and vegetables. However, I did better than that. All very disappointing. No lovely spies tried to run off with me, no Germans bought me drinks; I might with equal excitement have spent the day in Southend. No beds on the aircraft that night, either. We sat up all the way to Britain. If need be, most of us would have stood up on our heads to get there.

April 5th, 1942.

To-day the Clipper arrived off the Irish coast; a day of high wind, cold, with rain and some sleet, as we found to our cost in transhipping, after an hour or two's wait, from the Clipper to a flying-boat. We then flew to the south coast of England.

During the journey Mr. X. began to tell me something of his career. I am constantly surprised at the remarkable adventures of ordinary folk and of their careers, which are often far more interesting than my own. For example, he worked during the last war on various Admiralty devices, including the paravane, and about 1924 was a Lieutenant-Commander in the Navy, instructing in scientific subjects. He has written two or three scientific books. I asked him what royalty he got. He said: "Five per cent. on a book priced about a guinea." I said: "How many did they sell?" He said: "About thirty-odd thousand." I said: "That's damned scandalous—you ought to have started at 10 per cent. and risen to about 25 per cent." He said, "Yes,"—he began to think it wasn't too good, and decided to have a shot at writing another kind of book and publishing it himself. He had tried some experiments at improving his health by a careful diet; and now sat down and wrote a book on diet priced 1*s*. He certainly went the whole hog, for he printed 475,000 and took copies round himself to various booksellers in London, including Foyle's. Quite a few of them took a reasonable number, but he soon saw that this method would by no means get rid of 475,000. He therefore approached an agent, and they came to an arrangement whereby this agent spent considerable sums of money on advertising the book—money, of course, provided by Mr. X. The sales now went up by leaps and bounds until they had sold about 300,000, and Mr. X. was making out of it about £800 a year. The final 100,000, he said, he used to fill up an old well in the garden which needed filling up. I said: "Why did you do that? Had the sales stopped?" He said: "No, they hadn't stopped, but I got fed up with it." He described an amusing incident in

Foyle's when he came across one of his old teachers who had taught him science at the University examining a pile of these 1*s.* books, muttering to himself with some displeasure, and working the bottom of his waistcoat up and down as he did when he was perturbed, and apparently viewing this departure of his pupil into a new line of country with some dismay.

Mr. X. has decided views on diet, which I dare say are quite sound. He said, for example, that the feeling of hunger is often caused by the walls of the stomach touching one another—that your body by no means always requires further food at this time, and that if you drink plenty of water, which will prevent the stomach walls touching, the feeling of hunger may pass away. He favours eating slowly (as Mr. Gladstone did), drinking orange water, and putting the feet up for fifteen minutes before eating (this, I am sure, is a good plan to compose one's nervous system). He doesn't believe in eating much protein—meat, for example—especially in a hot country, where the rate of decomposition in one's inside is very high.

Discussing when we shall see the end of the war, he said it is by no means impossible it will end through pestilence, for typhus is already widespread in Europe. (This reminds me that I heard in Lisbon that my old friend, J. M. N. Jefferies, has had typhoid in Madrid and passed through Lisbon on his way to recuperate.)

Mr. X. had some interesting comments to make on India, where he has been building a bridge. He said the system of control by the Supply Department in India might be improved; he said the Department has no control over various works manufacturing munitions, etc., and that the factories work as and when they like and charge as much as they like. On the bridge which I have referred to, they employed 6,000 Indians and twenty-five British foremen. They built the bridge, deliberately leaving an 18-inch gap in the middle; and there came a crucial and dramatic day when this enormous bridge had to be so adjusted that the 18-inch gap was closed. It was a bridge costing over £2,000,000, and with cranes (if I remember aright) each weighing over 300 tons; the bridge is one of the biggest in the world. The moment when this gap was satisfactorily closed must have been a terrific one for him and everybody concerned. What a documentary film a piece of work of this kind would make!

Talking of Calcutta, he said: "One sees people lying dead in the street every day in the cold weather." Another sidelight: There's the manager of a big British firm of agents who draws in salary £25,000 a year. (He thought, as I think, this is an exorbitant salary to take out of India.) Some of the British people in Calcutta, in his view, have done us no good. They drink too much, are too loud-voiced and boisterous, treat the Indians in too off hand a way. (On the other hand, as I found in my own small experience, Indians can be inefficient, lazy and irritating.

Many have developed—and no doubt we are partly responsible—a kind of slave mentality which sticks rigidly to the book of rules, no matter how desirable it is that the rules should be departed from, and refuse to display any initiative.)

One of the fundamental things wrong in India, so far as we are concerned, is that generally speaking our business people go there for a limited period, with no intention of living their lives there. Most of our people take what they can, as quickly as they can, and get out. India, and Burma, one cannot help feeling after a very limited experience, are countries which in climate are ill suited to us. We live there, so far as we do live, under somewhat artificial conditions, with life made tolerable only by the use of ice, of fans, of periods of rest during the day, and by departing when we can to the higher parts of the country during the torrid period. Moreover, during later years we have not always sent to the Far East our best people, but very often our second-best. We have sneered a good deal at our public schools, but we have not yet put the right equivalent in their place; we have not always bred in our secondary schools that high sense of duty which, at all events, the public-school man often possesses. In the same way, we have largely forsaken Christianity and put nothing worthy or adequate in its place. There's a sense in which we need a new religion which will instil a high sense of duty and public service into our people.

But it mustn't be thought that we have no first-rate people of the highest integrity in India. We have. The work of some of our Civil Servants and officials generally deserves the highest praise. Unfortunately, we haven't enough of them. India is suffering in her ordeal from a lack of trained, first-class administrators. I wonder whether it wouldn't be wise to send out to India a number of our Army officers, from the age of forty-five upwards, who are now being axed in the Army? A fair number of them, at all events, must be good executives, for they have not long been out of civil life.

One can't help feeling that in India, as in some other places in our Empire, we have rather fallen between two stools. We went to India as traders and conquerors, no doubt ruthless and ruling to a considerable degree by the sword and the gun. Our pioneers were tough men, hard-working, and many of them took wives—or at all events, mistresses—from Indian families; and sometimes from very good Indian families. I was told more than once by people qualified to speak that the taking of British wives to India and the Far East has been a mistake: that it has resulted (*a*) in our men ceasing to know India so truly and deeply as they knew it before; and (*b*) that our women quarrel a good deal among themselves, indulge sometimes in sexual escapades which shed no credit on white people, and, moreover, look down their noses at the Indians even more contemptuously than do the more stupid of our men,

when in fact the Indians they choose to look askance at may well be more distinguished and of nobler lineage than themelves.

Now the Indians are much too intelligent to be unaware of some of these things.

How grand it is to be back, despite the wind and rain and cold; despite the unpicturesque houses, and the dull lunch of meat, cabbage and potatoes. (A far better lunch than I had expected. I had been told everybody is thinner. They don't look much thinner to me.) The kindness of the Customs, passport, security and other folk is fine; they offer to send telegrams for me.

By heavens, how bitter the wind is !

I asked a R.A.F. sergeant on the railway station how the war is going. He's a man to whom many come for advice and help. " Ah ! " he said. " This war isn't a hundred per cent. How ? Why, a lot o' chaps think they're getting a raw deal. Their wives come to me—eighteen bob a week plus his compulsory seven shillings and a few bob for each of the kids. And probably a pound a week in rent. Work it out for yourself—not much more than the dole used to be. The women come to me about their husbands—haven't heard from him. ' Send him a wire,' I say. Well, they haven't the money. And they know what their pals are making on munitions."

Not a 100 per cent. war.

We have not achieved it in Britain, nor in the Middle East, nor in the Far East. I cannot move on my journeys without being impressed by that fact. I cannot move without somebody unburdening himself to me on some fault he has found, some grievance that needs remedy, some shortcoming that, in his view, needs righting. I must add that he usually accompanies his remarks by saying: " But please don't say I said so, or I shall get into trouble "—as though some incipient Gestapo dogged his heels.

I was an infantryman in the last war. We used to say in our mixed satiric-humorous vein: " If this war lasts long enough, we shall be fighting it quite well." Quite true; we finished with the largest and best air force; we invented the tank.

This is a harder war than the last, our enemies stronger, our own difficulties deeper and more widespread. We began it lacking that gaiety of spirit, that quest for adventure that marked 1914; we knew what war was by 1939.

We were a pacifist nation, setting our hands to doing a dirty job reluctantly but grimly. We began our march to war on laggard feet—or our Government did—and we were terrified of saying what our war aims were, or what sort of a Britain we were determined to build when the ordeal was over. Not yet have we been explicit enough, bold enough, courageous enough, lifted up our hearts and cried: " This and that

abuse we will make an end of. No more rotting at street corners for skilled men; no more fields running to sourness, no more shipyards 'sterilised,' no more merchant skippers on the stones." We haven't said it yet. We haven't yet made every man and woman in our armed forces feel that this is his and her own war. (Some of them seem to think it's the L.M.S. railway company's war, so to speak—something remote from them.)

If a man is fighting in Singapore or Burma or India or Libya and you have never taught him what his Empire is and what it stands for and what you are striving to do there, and how far his livelihood and well-being depends on that Empire, and that he's a member of a proud and noble race, he may wonder what he's doing fighting there at all. It's a trifle late in the day to tell him now, but he'd better be told. Similarly, if the piece of Britain that was his and the life that was his wasn't enough to inspire him, we should be wise to assure him that we mean it to be better after this war and to try and inspire him by that. When Mr. Lloyd George talked of homes for heroes he was right. We could have had them, had we been firm enough and imaginative enough and unconventional enough. If the war ended to-morrow, we should be told by certain gentlemen that we could not afford, from the next day onwards, to spend a farthing on anything that doesn't show a profit, that if nobody is waiting with an order to buy our ships we must not build them; and so forth. And yet if the war continues another year, or two years, we shall not hesitate to spend 14 millions a day every day of those two years.

But I believe we shall be wiser after this war.

We are not fighting the war 100 per cent., and shall not so long as serious inequalities exist between soldier and munitions worker, between the power of privilege, on the one hand, and the tyranny of poverty on the other. We hear a good deal, and rightly, about the daughter of a Duke working a drill in a factory; but we hear less of the son of a highly-placed man who takes rather less risk than we might expect. There's no divine right to comfort and safety.

We seem to have a natural inability to see a war coming, or to prepare for a war. Our experience in this war is not new. We were no more ready for the Spanish Armada in 1588 than for the drive through the Low Countries in 1940. Nelson complained of the quality of his ships, as the pilot of 1940 might have complained of his outmoded Fairey Battle. We had no Stokes mortars in 1915 any more than all our warships have adequately armoured decks in 1942. We are almost as good as the Germans at under-estimating the foe. We appear to have imagined the Japanese would fight in the jungles with assegais.

But one can be more detailed than that. We are still too reluctant, I

think, to give command of armoured divisions to men reared in the Tank Corps. We seem to prefer cavalrymen or infantrymen. At heavy cost in tanks and men, we have been teaching generals their business. This reluctance has been deep-seated and goes back to the War Office's neglect of tanks so soon as the last war was over. When Hitler marched through Holland and Belgium two years ago, we had of heavy tanks in France two and only two battalions—and somewhat antediluvian weapons at that. Twenty-three of them—that is all—had a gun bigger than a machine-gun, even to-day we have not a British tank in Libya with a gun bigger than a 2-pounder. Not much more than a year ago, one of our able tank experts (he has an important command now) was serving as a private in the Home Guard. (Mr. Churchill remedied that.) The officer who wrote what the tank men call the *Purple Primer* on tank fighting (a book the Germans were swift to profit by) has had, I believe, little to do with armoured formations since.

I do not think our co-operation between Army, Navy and Air Force is remarkably efficient. It has improved steadily, but it isn't perfect—or we should not bomb our own troops as we sometimes do, and the time lag between the R.A.F. being informed of a target in the field and their striking at it would be less. We should do better, I believe, if we had a R.A.F. officer with every large contingent of infantry or tanks in the field, and if that officer had apparatus for speaking straight to aircraft. The superb gallantry of our R.A.F. officers and men is allied from time to time with a certain casualness. Bravery and dash fight against caution. Youth is not usually meticulous about adequate food, hot drinks, safety devices that may, in emergency, mean the difference between life and death. Perhaps we need older men to keep an alert eye on those matters?

We might, with advantage—

Improve the mail service to our armed forces, especially from the base abroad to the forward lines.

Provide a stimulant in tablet form for use on days of immense stress and when sleep is short.

Give the D.S.O., M.C., D.C.M., M.M., and similar awards in our other services, posthumously.

Add to the number of aircraft carrying people from Britain to and from theatres of war.

Stop sending chocolate and other luxuries from Britain to Cairo, where our troops buy them and return them home.

Encourage rather less drinking and rather more thinking.

Officers and men should be encouraged to bring their suggestions before higher authorities. In theory, I dare say, they are so encouraged. But too often suggestions are lost in the climb to the right man, and it is not unknown for juniors to be rebuked or cold shouldered as though they

had grievously offended. To be critical, and to be right, can be a heavy brake on a man's career.

Senior officers, on their side, should spend more time finding out what their juniors say and think. Shortcomings sometimes continue because seniors don't know they exist. Those who tell me of faults don't always inform those who could right them. Fear damps down ardour and zeal.

So that you'll see, in my view, there's a lot to be done. We're a trifle slow, a bit old-fashioned. Even our Navy has not distinguished itself for initiative or for forward-thinking. For gallantry, yes, for seamanship, decidedly, but for inventiveness, ingenuity, cunning, breaking new ground? Hardly. The Navy isn't sacrosanct, though my Lords of the Admiralty would like it to be. If you finish in Alexandria a despatch describing the Navy's work at 1.15 p.m., it won't be censored till 5 p.m., because during the afternoon no censor is on duty. Yet we're in the third year of the war. That shortcoming won't lose the war; but it may be more significant than one could wish.

We shall win this war as surely as the sun will rise to-morrow—provided we make our war effort 100 per cent. We shall probably win it, anyhow. But how soon? How many brakes are we going to allow to retard the wheels? The wheels aren't running yet as fast and free as they might—and must.

We shall not have reached the highest pitch of our war effort till each of us realises, and agrees, and lives on the basis, that none of us has the right to be safer than anybody else, or more comfortable than anybody else; that there's no reason why Tom Harris should die in his ship, or James Watson in his tank, or Harry Brownrigg in the jungle unless we are equally ready to die for them. We cannot all do what they do; other tasks are equally important. But the acceptance of the idea must be in us, the readiness to do all and dare all, and to suffer all. We haven't all reached that pitch yet. But who among us dare deem himself set aside by Fate (combined with himself) to survive while others perish to save him?